

A Commentary on the New Testament

Volume One
Matthew through Romans

Written by
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Preface

The scriptures I quote are from the ACV (A Conservative Version), which is my own translation. Also I use gender pronouns and other gender relevant words in their historic meaning.

The Holy Bible is the word of our Creator God for man. It is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each of those testaments consists of God's testimony about him and his will for us. The New Testament is about his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who came from heaven to live in the world as a man. He came into the world so that he could defeat God's enemies and save the souls of those who love him. And the words of the New Testament contain the best of God's wisdom for us.

Regarding knowledge of God, he does not make himself obvious to the world because he wants us to search for him. As the apostle Paul said to the Athenians, **"The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things."**

"And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us. For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring" (Acts 17:24-28). God wants us to search for him and his will for us because he is testing our worthiness to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

I have studied the Bible virtually all my life in my search for him and his will for us. I study the Bible much the way scientists study the natural world. They search for the truth of things natural from the data they obtain from their observations of nature. And I search the truth of things spiritual from the data I obtain from my study of the word of God. For I have as much faith in the truth of the word of God as they do in the truth of the laws of nature.

Moreover, I have also studied the best of the books and ideas men have proclaimed about things spiritual. And the words of the Bible far exceed whatever wisdom and knowledge men have offered about those things. Indeed, the very contents of the Bible itself is proof that it is the word of God. And every man who loves truth and righteousness will see that when he reads the Bible. For, being the word of God, it is filled with the greatest truth and wisdom about our eternal souls.

Jesus told how wisdom is proven when he said, **"And wisdom is justified from all her children"** (Luke 7:35). And the offspring (consequences) of applying the wisdom of the Bible has been proven throughout history. For every nation that lives by its teachings has been exalted in the world, exalted far above every other nation that does not live that way. For the Bible promotes truth and righteousness. And as Solomon said, **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"** (Proverbs 14:34).

Therefore dear reader, the reason I wrote this commentary of the New Testament is first to help you understand its words and its teachings. And second, to help you apply those words and teachings to your lives. That will help you live the very best way in this world

filled with inescapable tribulations. And best of all it will enable you to save your soul to become a son of God for eternity in the perfect world of heaven where there will never be any tribulations.

I have spent several years in labor writing this commentary for you. I expect no earthly reward for it, except for the joy of knowing I have shared my knowledge of God's wisdom for our salvation. I feel the same joy as the apostle John did when he wrote these words about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, **"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (and the life was made known, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father, and was made known to us), what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that ye also may have fellowship with us. Even also our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

"And we write these things to you, so that our joy may be made full. And this is the message that we have heard from him and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (First John 1:1-5).

I too write for you about God and the Bible so that you also may have fellowship with us, which fellowship is with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. And as John said, that enables our joy to be full, both your joy and mine.

"Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, alone wise, to God is honor and glory into the ages of the ages. Truly" (First Timothy 1:17).

A Commentary on The Biography of Jesus by Matthew

Matthew does not identify himself as the author. However, information about the issue of Matthew's authorship is widely available. Suffice to say the great majority of scholars agree that Matthew wrote this biography of Jesus.

A Genealogy of Jesus

- **A book of a genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers, and Judah begot Perez and Zerah from Tamar, and Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab, and Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon, and Salmon begot Boaz from Rahab, and Boaz begot Obed from Ruth, and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king.**
- **And David begot Solomon from the widow of Uriah, and Solomon begot Rehoboam, and Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa, and Asa begot Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah, and Uzziah begot Jotham, and Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah, and Hezekiah begot Manasseh, and Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah, and Josiah begot Jechoniah and his brothers during the Babylonian exile.**
- **And after the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel begot Abiud, and Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor, and Azor begot Zadoc, and Zadoc begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud, and Eliud begot Eleazar, and Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.**
- **So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the Babylonian exile fourteen generations, and from the Babylonian exile to the Christ fourteen generations (Matthew 1:1-17).**

The word christ is a transliterated Greek word for anointed, while the word messiah is the transliterated Hebrew word for anointed. Although other men have been anointed for various reasons, the words Christ and Messiah in the New Testament always refer the Son of God. (And for that reason they are always capitalized in our English translations.)

The second psalm of the Old Testament speaks of the Christ that way: **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us.**

He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his great displeasure.

“Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree. Jehovah said to me, Thou are my Son, this day I have begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the outermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron, thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.

“Now therefore be wise, O ye kings. Be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

The Christ was prophesied to be of the seed of Abraham and of David, meaning a descendant of them. However, Jesus had no biological father because he was born of a virgin. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was not only begotten of God in heaven, but also on the earth. Hence, God was his Father in every sense of the word. How then could he be the seed of Abraham and David? He was their seed in a legal sense because his legal father was Joseph the husband of his mother Mary. Therefore, Jesus was properly regarded the seed of Abraham and of David through Joseph.

This genealogy of him in Matthew was probably given as evidence of that fact, which was not well known by the people. For example, the apostle John said, **“Many from the multitude therefore, when they heard the saying, said, This is truly the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. Others said, For does the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there became a division among the multitude because of him”** (John 7:40-43). I say more farther on about why the Christ had to be of the seed of Abraham and of David.

The second of the three genealogical groupings appears to contain only thirteen generations. Various explanations have been offered to explain why Matthew said the three groupings were all of fourteen generations. I prefer the explanation that says David was counted twice: once at the end of the first group and again at the beginning of the second group. In support of that explanation, consider how the first sentence that introduces the genealogy only contains the names of Abraham and David. And the last sentence that summarizes the genealogy only mentions Abraham and David.

The following table shows the three genealogical groupings reckoned that way:

Abraham to David	David to the Exile	After the Exile
Abraham	David	Jeconiah
Isaac	Solomon	Shealtiel
Jacob	Rhoboam	Zerubbabel
Judah	Abijah	Abiud

Abraham to David	David to the Exile	After the Exile
Perez	Asa	Eliakim
Hezron	Jehoshaphat	Azor
Ram	Joram	Zadok
Amminadab	Uzziah	Achim
Nashon	Jotham	Eliud
Salmon	Ahaz	Eleazar
Boaz	Hezekiah	Matthan
Obed	Manasseh	Jacob
Jesse	Amon	Joseph
David	Josiah	Jesus Christ

Abraham was the father of the Hebrew race. And God promised him that the savior of the world would be from his seed. As the book of Genesis says, **“And the agent of Jehovah called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because thou have done this thing, and have not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou have obeyed my voice”** (Genesis 22:15-18).

Jehovah spoke those words to Abraham after he was about to take the life of Isaac his only son (by his wife Sarah) in obedience to God’s command that he use him as a burnt offering. However, God stopped him at the last moment. That command of God to sacrifice Isaac, the son of his promise to Abraham, was his final test of the faith of Abraham. And because Abraham remained completely obedient, therefore God gave him that great promise. For it was from the seed of Abraham that God’s only begotten son was born into the world and became the savior of it.

David was the second most significant name in the listing because God promised him an everlasting dynasty, which came through Jesus Christ. God’s only begotten Son was the last of the kings of David because he is the eternal king. God gave David that promise after David sought to build a temple for him. David had been faithful to God even when he had been severely persecuted. Not only was David faithful to God, but he showed great love for him.

David demonstrated great faith and love for God. And he did many things to promote love for God among the people. He was like Peter in openly proclaiming his love and commitment to the Lord. David did later commit one very grievous sin. Nevertheless, he repented of it, and he endured with longsuffering the lifelong curse that God gave against him

because of it. (That sin and God's curse against David because of it are described in Second Samuel 11-12.)

However, before that terrible sin, David had been completely faithful to God, and he even wanted to build a temple for him in place of a tabernacle. Jehovah responded to that desire by sending the prophet Nathan to him. Through Nathan, Jehovah said many things to David, among which are these: **"I took thee from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, that thou should be prince over my people, over Israel. And I have been with thee wherever thou went, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee. And I will make thee a great name, like the name of the great ones that are on the earth.**

"And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more. Neither shall the sons of iniquity afflict them any more, as at the first, and as from the day that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and I will cause thee to rest from all thine enemies.

"Moreover Jehovah tells thee that Jehovah will make thee a house. When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shall sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, who shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (Second Samuel 7:8-13).

That royal seed was God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ. And the kingdom he established on the earth is his church. Therefore, because God had made that promise to David, the people were waiting for that king. Consequently, David was listed twice in the genealogy: once at the end of the first group and once at the beginning of the second group. Thus Matthew said there were fourteen generations in each of his three groups.

Note: The word son as used in the Bible includes any male descendant of a man, regardless of how distant or remote. Hence, it can be said that Jesus was the son of Abraham and David.

Joseph learns Mary is pregnant

- **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was this way. For his mother Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found having in her womb from the Holy Spirit. But Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to expose her to public disgrace, intended to dismiss her privately** (Matthew 1:18-19).

A betrothal was a legal commitment to marry. It was more than a simple promise between the man and the woman. Nevertheless, betrothal was not marriage. Hence, the laws of adultery would not apply; the laws of fornication would.

The only law of Moses about a betrothed woman who commits fornication is this one: **"And whoever lies carnally with a woman, who is a bondmaid, betrothed to a husband, and not at all redeemed, nor freedom given her, they shall be punished. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free"** (Leviticus 19:20). However, that was a law about a bondmaid and not a free woman.

Here is the law about a woman not betrothed who commits fornication: **“And if a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay a dowry for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins”** (Exodus 22:16-17).

Apparently therefore, Joseph had some liberty to decide for himself what to do with Mary if she had been guilty of fornication. And so Joseph decided to dismiss her from the betrothal. However, he must have still loved her, because he did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He no doubt wanted to dismiss her because he was a righteous man, and did not want to marry a woman who violated her virginity and concealed it from him.

Gabriel, an agent from God, had already appeared to Mary, and told her she would bear a child begotten by the Holy Spirit even though she was a virgin (see Luke 1:26-33). However, nothing is said in the record about what she may have told Joseph about it. Perhaps she had no opportunity to confide in him. Indeed, Joseph may have learned of her condition from some other source.

There are many things we could conjecture about that situation. However, the Holy Spirit, who guided the hands of the authors of the New Testament, chose not to reveal anything more. Such details are not necessary for us to know.

An agent of the Lord assures Joseph

- **But while he considered these things, behold, an agent of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take Mary to be thy wife, for that which was begotten in her is from the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son, and thou shall call his name JESUS, for he will save his people from their sins** (Matthew 1:20-21).

The biography of Jesus by Luke describes how the heavenly agent Gabriel visited Mary, and he said to her, **“Fear not, Mary, for thou have found favor with God. And behold, thou will conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son. And thou shall call his name JESUS. This man will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob into the ages. And of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

Then the record says, **“And Mary said to the agent, How will this be, since I know not a man? And having answered, the agent said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High will overshadow thee. Therefore also the holy thing that is begotten will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:30-35).

For some reason Mary did not immediately inform Joseph about that visitation. Instead, she apparently departed to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth soon after the agent appeared to her. For the agent had informed Mary of Elizabeth’s pregnancy: **“And behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman, she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For no word from God will be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the maid-servant of the Lord. May it happen to me according to thy word. And the agent departed from her.”** And then the passage says, **“And having risen in these days, Mary went with haste into the hill country, into a city of**

Judah, and entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth” (Luke 1:36-40).

Mary no doubt went to Elizabeth to help her in those last months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, because Luke says that Mary remained with Elizabeth for three months. And apparently she had no contact with Joseph during that time. Even after three months Mary would still not have been noticeably with child. Nevertheless, in some way Joseph learned of her condition and was troubled by it.

Joseph had no doubt struggled within himself about what to do about Mary. He could have still married her and accept the child as his own. And who besides him and Mary would have known the difference? Yet her (apparent) unfaithfulness would have left a permanent scar on their marriage, and given him lingering doubts about her.

However, before he responded, the agent of God reassured him of her righteousness: that she had not betrayed him but was still a virgin. Indeed, she was with child by the very Holy Spirit of God, which was a supreme honor and testimony of her righteousness.

The agent even told Joseph that he should name the child Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. The name Jesus comes from a Hebrew word that means savior or deliverer. For Jesus was sent into the world to become our Redeemer, to save our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins, and to give us eternal life.

How Jesus’ name is to be pronounced is rather controversial. Some of those suggested are these: Joshua, Yehoshua, Ihesus. However, it is not important exactly how it was pronounced. We all pronounce our words differently to some degree, which is how we can recognize persons by their speech. Therefore, it is foolish to argue about the exact pronunciation. Paul condemned quarreling about such differences of opinion (see Romans 14). The important thing is that we use his name with reverence, regardless of how it is pronounced.

The prophecy of Jesus’ virgin birth

- **Now all this has come to pass, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Behold, the virgin will have in her womb, and will bring forth a son. And they will call his name Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us** (Matthew 1:22-23).

That prophecy was recorded in the book of Isaiah (7:14). It was given to Ahaz king of the tribe of Judah when that tribe was threatened with an attack from Syria and Ephraim (Ephraim was of the ten northern tribes of Israel, but that name was often used for the ten tribes themselves). The passage says, **“And Jehovah spoke again to Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God, ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, nor will I test Jehovah. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David. Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also?**

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhor shall be forsaken” (Isaiah 7:10-16).

There were many prophecies about the coming Christ, and Jesus fulfilled them all. The four biographies of him that we have—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—describe how those prophecies were fulfilled during his life on earth.

Joseph kept Mary virgin until the birth

- **And Joseph, being roused from his sleep, did as the agent of the Lord ordered him. And he took his wife, and knew her not until she brought forth her son, the firstborn. And he called his name JESUS** (Matthew 1:24-25).

The agent of God appeared to Joseph in a dream. However, the biography of Jesus written by Luke says an agent of God named Gabriel appeared to Mary in person when he told her she would bear the Son of the Most High even though she was a virgin (see Luke 1:26-27). Perhaps one reason why God sent Gabriel to appear to Mary in person was a way of encouraging her to endure the condemnation she was going to experience because she would be with child without having a husband. She would face emotional stress much greater than Joseph did about her condition.

The wise men from the east

- **Now Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who is born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him. And Herod the king having heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**
- **And having gathered together all the chief priests and scholars of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ is born. And they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea. For thus it is written through the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the rulers of Judah, for out of thee will come forth a man who rules, who will tend my people Israel.**
- **Then Herod having called the wise men privately, ascertained from them what time the star appeared. And having sent them to Bethlehem, he said, After going, search diligently about the child. And when ye find him, report to me, so that I also having come, may worship him** (Matthew 2:1-8).

There are many mysteries about that story. The number of wise men is not told. Exactly where they came from is not told. How they knew about the birth of the king of the Jews is not told. What kind of star guided them is not described, nor are we told how it guided them. As a result of all those mysteries there have been many conjectures made about them.

One popular theory is that those wise men were descendants of the ones that Daniel supervised when he was made an official in the Babylonian empire. The theory says it was from the knowledge of Daniel that those wise men learned about the Messiah. For Daniel received many visions about the future.

Nevertheless, regardless of which theory is correct, I am not going to attempt to mention any of the other theories or to add to them. Such things are interesting, but not important for us to know about.

It was natural for those wise men to inquire of king Herod about the birth of the king of the Jews. No doubt they thought that surely if anyone knew about it he would. For the child was born king of the Jews. Of course, no child who inherits such a thing ever reigns until he matures enough to be judged capable. As Paul said, **“But I say the heir, for as long a time as he is a child, differs nothing from a bondman though he is lord of all. Instead he is under stewards and managers until the time appointed from the father”** (Galatians 4:1-2). Nevertheless, such a child should be given the greatest care and attention. Hence, the wise men went to king Herod.

The prophecy quoted to Herod was from the book of Micah. And it says, **“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which are little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee he shall come forth to me who is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”** (Micah 5:2). Those words are from the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Herod was an exceedingly wicked man, and he had no intention of worshiping the child. As the record farther on shows, he planned to kill it. Herod was also very crafty, and so he gave no indication of his evil intent. Nevertheless, he trusted the wise men to report back to him about exactly where to find the child. It was a lapse in his otherwise shrewd dealings. For he could easily have sent a group of his men with them. The reason he did not was no doubt because God was protecting his Son by controlling Herod's thoughts. For Solomon said, **“The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as streams of water. He turns it wherever he will”** (Proverbs 21:1).

The wise men find the child

- **And when they heard the king, they departed. And lo, the star that they saw in the east went before them until, having come, it stood over where the child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.**
- **And having come into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and having fallen down, they worshiped him. And having opened their treasures, they brought to him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed into their own country by another way** (Matthew 2:9-12).

How that “star” (that bright light in the sky) was able to point to exactly where the child was is another mystery. What the Bible calls a star was probably not the kind of celestial body that we now define, but simply a bright spot in the sky. Nevertheless, the wise men were exceedingly glad they found him. And even though the child was not in royal circumstances, they still trusted the guidance of the star that the child they located was the king of the Jews. And so they worshiped him, and gave him all those treasures.

How old Jesus was when the wise men came is not told. However, we know he was more than forty days old, for reasons I explain in my comments about the next passage.

God warned those wise men in a dream not to return to Herod. The book does not say whether or not they were given a reason why. Nevertheless, they heeded that warning and returned to their own country by another way. I have no doubt they would have warned Joseph if God had informed them what Herod planned to do. God had his own way of warning Joseph.

Joseph flees with Mary and the child to Egypt

- **Now after they departed, behold, an agent of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, saying, After rising, take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and thou be there until I tell thee, for Herod is going to seek the child to destroy it.**
- **And having awakened, he took the child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt. And he was there until the end of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Out of Egypt I called my Son (Matthew 2:13-15).**

How long it was after the birth of Jesus that the agent of the Lord appeared to Joseph is not told. However, it could not have been immediately, because Luke's biography of Jesus tells how he took Mary to the temple to fulfill the required sacrifice after the birth of a child. And she could not have gone there for at least forty days, because the law of Moses required that long for her purification after the birth of a son (see Leviticus 12:1-4).

I explain those things in more detail in my comments about Luke's record of the offering of sacrifice that was required after the forty days were ended (see Luke 2:21-24). Nevertheless, it seems probable to me that the agent appeared to Joseph, commanding him to go to Egypt, soon after that required sacrifice was satisfied.

After hearing the agent's command to flee, Joseph did not delay obeying him. He immediately arose and departed for Egypt with the child and his mother, even though it was still night. And God had provided for their support in Egypt from the treasures that the wise men gave the child. There were good markets in Egypt for Joseph to sell those treasures and live on the proceeds. Moreover, there were many Jews who had settled in Egypt. Joseph and Mary no doubt resided among them.

How long Joseph remained is not told. However, secular history says that Herod died the same year Jesus was born. Hence, Joseph may have stayed in Egypt for less than a year. The prophecy quoted by Matthew is from the book of Hosea: **"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son"** (Hosea 11:1).

Herod slaughters the baby boys

- **Then Herod, when he saw that he was scorned by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and having sent forth, he killed all the boys in Bethlehem, and in all the borders of it, from two years old and under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.**

- **Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, which says, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children. And she did not want to be comforted, because they are not (Matthew 2:16-18).**

That story reveals what an utterly wicked man king Herod was. He was told the newborn child was the king of the Jews. Therefore, in his eyes that child was a potential threat to his throne. In those days kings commonly executed or assassinated their rivals. And they had the power to do it.

That particular Herod is the one the world calls Herod the Great. They call him great because he commanded the construction of many mighty works, including the creation of the city of Caesarea with its remarkable artificial harbor. He was also responsible for the greatly enlarged temple area in Jerusalem. He was indeed great in terms of worldly accomplishments. But he was one of the most ruthless, cruel, and wicked of men. Therefore, I will not refer to him as Herod the Great.

How long Herod waited for a report from the wise men is not told. But it must have been several months. That is no doubt one reason Herod commanded the killing of all the boys up to two years old in Bethlehem and in all the region adjacent it. He wanted to be sure the potential rival to his throne was killed. And he cared not about how many innocent lives would be lost in the process. There have been many rulers in the world that protected themselves in such ruthless ways.

The prophecy quoted is from the book of Jeremiah: **“Thus says Jehovah: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping. Rachel weeping for her children, she refused to be comforted for her children, because they are not”** (Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, died in childbirth (see Genesis 35:16-20). She was buried just outside Bethlehem. Why the prophetic passage uses the name Ramah instead of Bethlehem is not known. Indeed, there is controversy about where that Ramah is located. But it must have been near Bethlehem, because the passage says all the boy babies were killed in Bethlehem and in all the vicinity of it.

It is not hard to imagine the great outcry of lamentation by all those grieving mothers. For every righteous mother would weep and lament if her child had been slaughtered that way. Yet these are such morally degenerate times that there are now many mothers who treat their babies with as much ruthlessness as Herod did; they get somebody to murder the child in their womb because they do not want it. And since the murder of the preborn is now legal, every year the corpses of millions of them are cast away like garbage. This is truly an evil generation.

Joseph returns with them to live in Nazareth

- **But when Herod perished, behold, an agent of the Lord appears in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, After rising, take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those seeking the child's life have died. And having awoken, he took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.**

- **But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And divinely warned in a dream, he withdrew into the parts of Galilee. And having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that he will be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:19-23).**

That makes four times the Bible says that an agent of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. In obedience to the agent of the Lord, Joseph returned to Israel, but he went to Galilee to live in Nazareth because he was afraid of the son of Herod. For no doubt Archelaus knew about the birth of the child, and about his father's efforts to destroy it. And Joseph did not want to risk Archelaus learning that he had fled with the child and its mother just before Herod had the baby boys in and around Bethlehem killed. Moreover, as the above passage says, he was divinely warned in a dream.

Joseph is only mentioned again in the life of Jesus when he and his mother took Jesus to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. That particular time they went they did not know he had remained behind when they departed in the caravan for their home (see Luke 2:42-50). Thus Joseph must have died sometime after Jesus was twelve years old and before he began his ministry. However, the Bible tells nothing more about Joseph.

The prophecy about Jesus being called a Nazarene is not found in the Bible. However, that does not mean there is a discrepancy. It simply means other prophecies about Jesus were given that were not recorded in any of the books of the Bible. Indeed, the Old Testament names several ancient books of the history of Israel that are not in the Bible, having apparently been lost.

Here are two examples: **“And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day”** (Joshua 10:13), and, **“Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?”** (First Kings 11:41).

The book of Jashar and the book of the acts of Solomon are not included in the Bible, and there are no known surviving copies of them. What we have in the Bible is sufficient for us.

John the immerser begins to preach

- **And in those days John the immerser comes, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached. For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of a man crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight (Matthew 3:1-3).**

The prophecy mentioned in that passage is this one from Isaiah: **“The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places smooth. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it”** (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God sent John to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Christ. And that preparation included their repentance, which meant turning away from their sins. The valleys being filled and the mountains and hills being brought low symbolize the removal of the obstacles in the hearts of the people to receiving the good news of Christ. And the crooked things being straightened and the rough made smooth symbolize the hearts of the people rejecting sin for righteousness, the righteousness of the kingdom of God that came through Christ.

Instead of going to urban areas John preached in the wilderness. And he apparently relied upon word of mouth to attract listeners. He commanded the people to repent of their sins. And he said the kingdom of the heavens had approached, which was all the more why the people should repent; they needed to prepare themselves for that kingdom.

Regarding the expression “**the kingdom of the heavens**,” Matthew’s biography of Jesus is the only book of the Bible that contains that expression, although the expressions “**the kingdom of God**” and “**the kingdom**” are sometimes used in his book. There is no single name used in the New Testament to refer to the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. Just as there is no single name used to refer to his church, which is the kingdom on earth. God no doubt made it that way so that no group could dominate the name.

John lived ruggedly

- **Now John himself had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leather belt about his waist. And his food was locusts and wild honey** (Matthew 3:4).

John was a very rugged man who lived in the wilderness of Judea away from civilization. He dressed in rustic clothing. And he wore a leather belt, which was an item of apparel associated with ruggedness. He obtained his nutrition from two of the things that the wilderness contained abundantly: locusts and honey. Eating locusts does not sound very appetizing to us. But they were listed in the law of Moses among the clean foods acceptable to eat. And I am told they are very nutritious and not unpleasant to eat.

Many are immersed by John

- **Then Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region of the Jordan went out to him, and they were immersed by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins** (Matthew 3:5-6).

John was no doubt a very powerful speaker, because all the people from a wide area came out to him. When the passage says “**Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region of the Jordan**,” that should not be taken literally. It no doubt means a large number, perhaps even the majority of the people from those places went out to him. For the passage also says “**they were immersed by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins**.” But not all were, because Jesus later said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, “**Truly I say to you, that the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in a way of righteousness, and ye did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him. And having seen it, ye did not repent afterward to believe him**” (Matthew 21:31-32).

John was apparently the first man to introduce the ritual of being immersed upon confession of sins. Secular historians claim the ritual is older than John. However, their claims are based upon washing for cleanliness rather than being fully immersed. They have a perverted concept of what that ritual (roughly transliterated baptism from the Greek word for it) really was.

John rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his immersion, he said to them, Ye offspring of vipers, who showed you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance.**
- **And think not to say within yourselves, We have a father, Abraham. For I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore not producing good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire** (Matthew 3:7-10).

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the leading sects among the Jews during those times. The Pharisees were primarily a religious sect, while the Sadducees were primarily political. Although Pharisees and Sadducees were among those who refused to repent and be immersed by John, apparently some of them did. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were among the chief enemies of Christ, but a few of them did believe in him.

John spoke harshly to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and called them offspring of vipers. It is very rare for a modern preacher anywhere to rebuke those of his listeners so harshly, or even at all. Moreover, there are many influential groups in America now that would revile John as a bigot, and would call his words “hate speech.” Such people often file lawsuits against those who speak that way, regardless of how true the words may be.

The coming wrath that John mentioned may refer to the final day of judgment. Or it could refer to the destruction of their land that was coming forty years hence. Israel was destroyed then because the people had rejected Jesus Christ the Son of God, their Messiah sent to them by God to save their souls.

John told them to produce fruit worthy of repentance. And that admonition applies to every man who repents. For repentance is in vain for those who do not produce fruit worthy of it. And that fruit means performing works of righteousness. He also warned them against relying upon their heritage. God indeed gave great promises for the sons of Abraham, but only for those who were his sons in spirit. That means those with the kind of working faith that Abraham had in God.

Those who inherited Abraham’s biology, but not the quality of his spirit are not considered special in the eyes of God. For John said that God could raise up biological sons of Abraham from the stones on the ground. However, only a man’s own spirit can make him a true son of Abraham. As Paul said to the Romans, **“For he is not a Jew in what is visible, nor is circumcision in what is visible, in flesh, but he is a Jew in what is hidden, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit not a document, whose praise is not from men but from God”** (Romans 2:28-29).

John went on to warn how their destruction was not far off. That may refer to the impending (historically speaking) doom of their land, but it could also mean the destruction of their souls. And that warning applies to every man. For even the longest life on earth is very short. As James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14). Therefore, for each one of us the axe is laid at our root. And unless we produce the good fruit of righteousness, we will be cut down and cast into the fire—the eternal fire of hell.

John speaks of the coming Christ

- **I indeed immerse you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit.**
- **Whose winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. And he will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire** (Matthew 3:11-12).

Although John was a strong and impressive man he was still very humble. And he confessed that the man coming after him was much greater than he. Remember, John’s mission was to prepare the people for the coming Christ. And John wanted the people to know that the coming Christ was a much greater man.

The Holy Spirit is only mentioned three times in the Old Testament, and for each of those times the word holy seems to be a descriptive adjective and not part of a name. Here is one of those passages: **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me”** (Psalm 51:10-11).

However, the Holy Spirit is mentioned ninety-two times in the New Testament, and each of those times the word holy is part of a name. That is why it is conventional in translations to capitalize the first letters of those words in the New Testament.

There is much that is mysterious about the Holy Spirit. I devote an entire chapter about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I will only say here that the Holy Spirit seems to be a special force that is part of God himself, but also has an individual identity. Jesus was begotten from God, but nothing is said about the Holy Spirit ever being begotten. Jesus also has an individual identity, but unlike the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not part of God himself. He is a separate being, having been begotten from God. If you want to know more about the Holy Spirit read that chapter about the Holy Spirit in my book.

John said the one coming after him (the Christ) would immerse the people in the Holy Spirit. Immersion in the Holy Spirit probably means that special force would engulf them. For Paul said to his brothers in Corinth, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?”** (First Corinthians 6:19).

That special force from God resides in our bodies as soon as we become a Christian. It is a gift from God when we become a disciple of his Son Jesus Christ. As Peter said in his first sermon to the Jews, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus**

Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Sinners cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). That helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit.

John used the allegory of harvesting wheat to symbolize how Jesus is testing our souls to determine who is worthy of salvation and who deserves eternal condemnation in Hell, which is the lake of fire that burns forever (see Revelation 20:10). That final separation will occur at the day of judgment after this world is over. Jesus also told a parable about separating wheat from tares, which gives the same lesson (see Matthew 13:24-30).

John immerses Jesus

- **Then Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be immersed by him. But John was preventing him, saying, I have need to be immersed by thee, and thou come to me? But having answered, Jesus said to him, Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allows him** (Matthew 3:13-15).

John was immersing for repentance, but Jesus had no need for repentance, having never sinned. And John, being the humble man he was, he said that Jesus should immerse him instead. I have no doubt Jesus insisted that John immerse him so that Jesus could become an example for us, an example to do righteous things even when they are not required.

Doing good things beyond what is merely necessary is a fulfillment of righteousness. That is why it is so sad that most people who believe in Christ refuse to be immersed for the remission of their sins. They think it is not necessary even though Jesus commanded it. If they had the spirit of Christ in them they would submit to immersion even if they thought it was unnecessary.

Such people are going to have no excuse when they face the day of judgment, because Jesus said, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:16). And Jesus himself was immersed even though it was not required of him.

It is significant that only after Jesus was immersed did the voice come from heaven and praise him (reported in the next verse), saying, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”** Jesus went beyond what was required for righteousness, and doing such things is one reason why God was well pleased with him. Jesus said many other things about going beyond what is required when he taught his disciples in what we call his sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5).

The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus

- **And when Jesus was immersed, he went up straightaway out of the water. And lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God**

descending like a dove, and coming upon him. And lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16-17).

That passage says the heavens were open to *him*, and *he* saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and coming upon him. However, according to John's biography of Jesus, John the immerser also saw that happen: **"And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou will see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God"** (John 1:32-34).

In this biography of Jesus by Matthew, he says that John recognized Jesus as the Christ before the Spirit descended like a dove upon him after his immersion (see Matthew 3:13-14). However, that passage in John's biography of Jesus said that John the immerser had not known Jesus as the Christ until after the Spirit descended like a dove out of heaven upon him. The Holy Spirit must, therefore, have descended upon Jesus that way at some time earlier to identify to John that Jesus was the Christ.

Scoffers use such differences to deride the Bible, but we who believe are like scientists, men who search for natural laws. We search for explanations to help us understand what we believe and know is the word of God. Scoffers in science never find anything, nor do they ever learn the truth of God. As Solomon said, **"A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding"** (Proverbs 14:6).

Regarding that sight of the dove after Jesus was immersed, whether other people saw those things is not told. The record of that event in Luke's biography of Jesus says, **"Now it came to pass, during the immersion of all the people, Jesus also having been immersed and praying, for the heaven to be opened, and the Holy Spirit to descend in a bodily form as a dove upon him, and a voice to occur out of heaven, saying, Thou are my beloved Son. In thee I am well pleased"** (Luke 3:21-22). It is possible other people did see and hear.

The apostle John also told of a time when God spoke to Jesus from heaven when a multitude was around him: **"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But because of this I came to this hour. Father, glorify thy name. A voice therefore came out of heaven, saying, I both glorified it, and I will glorify again. The multitude therefore that stood by and heard, said thunder occurred, others said, An agent has spoken to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice occurred not for my sake, but for your sakes"** (John 12:27-30). Some heard the voice and some did not.

Regarding the appearance of the Spirit of God, it did not appear as a mighty power when God spoke, but instead it appeared as a gentle dove. When the Spirit of God spoke that way it contrasted greatly from the time God spoke to the people of Israel from mount Sinai. For the book of Exodus says, **"And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die"** (Exodus 20:18-19).

Why did God show himself so gentle during the time of Jesus? Part of the reason was to fulfill a prophecy about Jesus (see Isaiah 42:1-4). Matthew quoted that prophecy later, when he said, **“And ... Jesus withdrew from there, and many multitudes followed him, and he healed them all. And he chided them so that they would not make him known, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Behold, my Boy whom I chose, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor will he shout, nor will any man hear his voice in the thoroughfares. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoldering flax he will not quench, until he sends forth justice for victory. And in his name Gentiles will hope”** (Matthew 12:15-21).

God showed himself gentle through his Son Jesus Christ, who is also called the Lamb of God. God has both a gently side and a fierce side. His gentle side is for the sheep of God that Jesus came to save. For Jesus said to the Jews who were rejecting him, **“But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:26-28). I say much more about those things in my commentary.

The devil tempts Jesus to create bread

- **Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And having fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward he was hungry. And after he who tempts came, he said to him, If thou are the Son of God, speak so that these stones may become bread. But having answered, he said, It is written, Man will not live on bread alone, but on every word coming out through the mouth of God** (Matthew 4:1-4).

Other translations call the devil “the tempter,” but the Greek word they translate is a verb not a noun. Properly translated the word is “he who tempts.” English translators commonly change the grammar of many of the Greek words they translate, such as from a verb to a noun, a noun to a verb, an adjective to a noun, etcetera. But I do not.

Regarding temptations, in the example of prayer that Jesus gave his disciples, he said, **“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...”** (Matthew 6:13). And Jesus said to his apostles on the night of his betrayal, **“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (Matthew 26:41).

Why then would the Spirit of God lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? The reason is that Jesus needed to be tested severely so that nobody could claim he was sinless only because he was not tempted sufficiently. And in order to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, and to prove that sin is not inevitable, it was necessary for Jesus to experience temptations without ever sinning.

Regarding the matter of fasting, I have read that a man can fast up to forty days without harming his body. Fasting longer produces permanent damage. Therefore, Jesus fasted as long as he could without risk of permanent harm to his body. God approves of fasting, but not when it causes harm.

God allows us to be tempted from time to time for his own high and noble purposes, such as with the case of Job (see the book of Job). God determines when temptations must be faced. But as with Job we cannot know when it is his determination. Therefore, we should always flee from temptation whenever we are able.

After Jesus fasted in the wilderness forty days and forty nights, the record tells how the devil subjected him to three temptations. The first one involved hunger. After fasting for so long, the record says that Jesus was hungry. Hunger begins the first day of fasting, and it increases with food deprivation until it reaches a maximum intensity, which then remains high until satisfied. And there is no doubt Jesus was at the maximum level of hunger feelings. And even though Jesus had the power to satisfy it supernaturally, he would not use that power because of his obedience to God.

Every one of us is subject to temptations to indulge the desires of our flesh. And we sin if we attempt to satisfy them wrongfully. The desire of a man to bed with his wife is no more a sin than to want to eat his own food. Lust is wanting something sinfully, such as to bed with a woman not his wife or to rob food. And to prove our worthiness to be sons of God for eternity we must follow the path of our Lord Jesus Christ and resist the lusts of our flesh, and every other temptation of the devil.

The devil is also called “he who tempts.” The first mention of the devil in the Bible is at the beginning when he was called the serpent, and he tempted the woman Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden. The devil tempts us to sin for at least two reasons. One reason is because he is the great adversary of God, and he wants allies to join him in opposing God. The second reason is because he hates us and wants our souls destroyed. He hates us because we have the potential to become sons of God for eternity, but he does not. He does not because he would never put on a body of flesh and live as a man in the world to prove his worthiness.

How the devil spoke to Jesus is not told. From what is said about all of the temptations it seems most probably that the spirit of the devil spoke to Jesus in his thoughts, and not in any kind of physical presence. Satan is indeed able to enter into the thoughts of men. For example, Luke says, **“And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And having departed, he conversed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him to them”** (Luke 22:3-4). Judas allowed Satan to manipulate him to betray Jesus, but Jesus resisted and rejected the devil’s temptations. And whenever evil thoughts enter into our minds we too should resist and reject them.

Jesus resisted that temptation of the devil by quoting an appropriate passage of scripture from the words of Moses: **“... man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Jehovah”** (Deuteronomy 8:3). We all consist of a body of flesh and an eternal spirit. And it is wrong and foolish to live for our flesh only. Yet the world is filled with people who do just that. And it puts them on the path to the death of their spirit, a living death in the fires of hell. To save our eternal spirit we must live by the word of God, which guides us on the path to live righteously.

The devil tempts Jesus to challenge God

- **Then the devil takes him into the holy city, and stands him on the pinnacle of the temple. And he says to him, If thou are the Son of God, cast thyself**

down, for it is written, He will command his agents about thee, and, They will take thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, Again it is written, Thou shall not challenge the Lord thy God (Matthew 4:5-7).

That temptation could be considered an example of the sin of what John called the pride of life (see First John 2:16). For Jesus would have had many spectators to see him do it. And if he had miraculously survived it would have immediately elevated him to greatness in their eyes. However, as with the devil's temptation of Eve, I suspect Jesus would have perished had he tried it. For as Jesus said, the devil **"is a liar and the father of it"** (John 8:44). Moreover, it would have been against the Father's will.

I do not believe the devil literally stood Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple. Remember, Jesus was in the wilderness, having fasted forty days. What probably happened is that the devil used Jesus' memories of the temple to give him some kind of mental imagery about being on the pinnacle. No doubt that is what the devil did when he tempted Judas to betray Jesus. He tempted Judas by first giving him a mental image of going to the rulers of the Jews with his offer. And Judas used those thoughts in his heart to actually go and offer to betray Jesus. But Jesus resisted and rejected the thought of casting himself from the pinnacle of the temple. And he again quoted a passage of scripture from Moses to oppose that temptation: **"Ye shall not challenge Jehovah your God ..."** (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Jesus had opposed the devil's first temptation by quoting words from the Bible. So the devil quoted a passage from the Bible to tempt him this second time. Beware lest disciples of the devil tempt you to sin by misapplying the words of the Bible to mislead you.

What the devil quoted was a passage of scripture from the psalms: **"For thou, O Jehovah, are my refuge! Thou have made the Most High thy habitation. There shall no evil befall thee, nor shall any plague come near thy tent, for he will give his agents charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone"** (Psalm 91:9-12). But unlike Jesus' opposition to sin, the devil quoted that scripture to tempt Jesus to sin.

God's promise to protect his Son Jesus Christ that way was literal. And the reason is because Jesus never sinned to be captured in the law of sin. Paul wrote about that law when he said, **"For I do not do good that I want, instead, wrong that I do not want, this I do. But if I do this that I do not want, I no longer perform it, but sin dwelling in me. Consequently I find the law in my wanting to do good, that evil is present in me."**

"For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body-parts, warring against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my body-parts. I am a wretched man. Who will rescue me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I of myself in the mind indeed serve a law of God, but in the flesh a law of sin" (Romans 7:19-25).

It is a sin to injure ourselves by dashing our foot against a stone. Yet, as Paul said of himself, none of us is able to prevent doing such things. We do not want to do them. But we do them anyway, because we have all been captured in the law of sin. And that happens when we first sin, just as it happened to Adam when he sinned. But Jesus never sinned. There-

fore, he was never subject to the law of sin. Consequently, God protected him from doing any kind of wrong that is inadvertent, any kind of foolish “mistake” in his behavior. I speak much more about these things in the chapter “The Sin of Adam” in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Deliberately taking any kind of foolish or unnecessary risk is challenging God. Dangerous thrill seeking is challenging God, although the world calls it daredevilry. Gambling is also challenging God, because Solomon said, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah”** (Proverbs 16:33). God determines the outcome of everything that happens, including things we think are the result of chance only. Therefore, gambling is challenging God to take from others to give us what we have not earned. I also speak much more about those things in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

The devil tempts Jesus to worship him

- **Again, the devil takes him onto an exceedingly high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. And he says to him, All these things I give thee, if after falling down, thou will worship me.**
- **Then Jesus says to him, Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shall worship the Lord thy God, and him only thou shall serve. Then the devil leaves him, and behold, agents came and served him** (Matthew 4:8-11).

Various explanations have been offered to explain how Satan could show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. However, I believe that passage is merely a figurative description of such a sight. There is and never has been such a mountain where that could be done. Even creating an exceedingly high mountain by supernatural power could not allow Jesus to see all those kingdoms with his eyes. Consequently, I believe that description is further evidence that the devil tempted Jesus in his thoughts. The exceedingly high mountain symbolized creating images in the mind of Jesus where he could imagine seeing all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

Nevertheless, Satan did have the actual power to give Jesus **“all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.”** For Jesus himself spoke of the devil as the ruler of the world. For example, during the last supper, he said to his apostles, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31).

God gave the world to mankind when he first created it. However, men have delivered the kingdoms of the world to the devil, because they have chosen him and his ways. God has allowed mankind to deliver the kingdoms of the world to the devil because God is the ultimate ruler. For example, the prophet Daniel said, **“... the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will”** (Daniel 4:25).

God has allowed mankind to deliver the kingdoms of the world to the devil, not because he deserves them, but because men have chosen the devil to rule over them instead of God. God allowed Hitler to rule over the German people because they chose him to be their lord and master instead of Jesus Christ. And the world is going to end much worse than Germany did under Hitler.

If Jesus had worshiped the devil, I have no doubt he would have become emperor of the Roman empire. And with that power he would have been able to extend the conquest of

Rome over every other kingdom, regardless of how remote it was. Jesus could have been the greatest emperor the world has ever known.

However, if Jesus had sinned against God that way, he would have died like every other man. And he and all of mankind would have been condemned to be cast into hell with the devil and the demons. We should all thank God that Jesus rejected all of the temptations of the devil. That is how he earned the right to redeem us from condemnation in hell with the devil and the demons, and enabled us to become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

As with the other two temptations, Jesus rebuffed the devil by quoting another passage of scripture from Moses: **“Thou shall fear Jehovah thy God, and him thou shall serve, and shall swear by his name”** (Deuteronomy 6:13). (I speak more about swearing in my commentary of Matthew 5:33-37.)

The best way to defeat the temptations of the devil is to continually rely upon the word of God. That is the reason the devil and his disciples continually strive to destroy the Bible and people’s faith in it. For wherever the word of God works in the hearts of men, there will be truth and righteousness.

Notice how the passage in Matthew says the devil departed from Jesus after he resisted his every temptation. That is characteristic of the devil, because James said, **“Be subordinate therefore to God, but resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). I have experienced many times when I rebuffed someone tempting me, and the result was always to have them walk away. Tempters hate being rebuffed.

Remember, it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And Jesus was no doubt alone there. Multitudes followed him only after he began his ministry, which was after this experience. Therefore, God sent his agents from heaven to serve Jesus because his body was in a very weakened condition. Indeed, he may not even have been able to walk out of the wilderness without being helped. God subjected Jesus to many trials and tribulations, but he never abandoned him. And God will never abandon us in our trials and tribulations as long as we remain faithful to him.

Jesus begins his ministry at Galilee

- **Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he departed into Galilee. And having left Nazareth behind, after coming, he dwelt in Capernaum by the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who dwell in darkness saw a great light, and to those who dwell in the region and shadow of death, light sprang up to them (Matthew 4:12-16).**

That prophecy is from this Old Testament passage: **“And they shall look to the earth, and, behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and into thick darkness to be driven away. But there shall be no gloom to her who was in anguish.**

“In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond

the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shone.

“Thou have multiplied the nation. Thou have increased their joy. They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou have broken as in the day of Midian. For all the armor of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall be for burning, for fuel of fire.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 8:22-9:7).

Capernaum was a city on the north shore of the sea of Galilee. Zebulun and Naphtali were both tribes of Israel. Why they were called Galilee of the Gentiles is not clear. Some have suggested it was because there were so many Gentiles there, but nobody knows.

The prophecy says the people who lived in those lands dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death. That means they were living in great spiritual ignorance, and that was threatening their souls. However, when Jesus came, they saw in him a great light that sprang up to them. Jesus brought truth and knowledge about God and his will to them. He was that great saving light.

Jesus calls for repentance

- **From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached** (Matthew 4:17).

Jesus preached repentance because that is the only way anyone can enter into the kingdom of the heavens, which Jesus came to establish. No man can enter into the kingdom of the heavens and have eternal life who does not repent of his sins. And that repentance involves not only an attitude of contrition for past sins, but it leads to a lifelong commitment to live righteously.

Repentance that does not cause a man to forsake sin and live righteously is not the kind of repentance that Jesus demands. Paul spoke of true repentance when he was describing the beginning of his preaching after his conversion. Paul said that he declared **“first to those at Damascus and then at Jerusalem, and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and return to God, doing works worthy of repentance”** (Acts 26:20). True repentance includes doing works worthy of it. In other words, we must prove our repentance by trying to make amends for our sins and living righteously.

Jesus begins to call his apostles

- **And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fish-**

ermen. And he says to them, Come behind me, and I will make you fishermen of men.

- **“And straightaway having left the nets, they followed him. And having gone on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And he called them. And straightaway having left the boat and their father, they followed him (Matthew 4:18-22).**

The biographies of Jesus by Luke and John explain more about why those men followed him. It was not simply because he called them to become fishermen of men. They had evidence sufficient to show that Jesus was from God, including the testimony of John the immerser. And Jesus has given us all ample evidence to follow him. That evidence is contained in the testimony of the New Testament record.

Being fishermen of men means taking men out of the sea of sin and making them a part of the kingdom of God. And that is done by persuading them with preaching to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, be immersed in water for the remission of them, and live a life of righteousness in obedience to Christ.

Jesus traveled preaching and healing

- **And Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. And his fame went forth into all Syria.**
- **And they brought to him all those faring badly with various diseases, and gripped with pain, and being demon-possessed, and being lunatic, and paralyzed. And he healed them.**
- **And many multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan followed him (Matthew 4:23-25).**

The message of salvation through Christ Jesus is literally called the good news. That is the meaning of the Greek word EUAGGELIZW, from which comes the word evangelist.

Preaching the good news of the kingdom was foremost in the labors of Jesus. Healing every sickness and every disease among the people was secondary to that. He used his powers to heal and to cast out demons primarily to prove that God had sent him. For neither the devil nor the demons nor any man has that kind of power, unless God gives it to him. And because of those miracles it was only natural that many multitudes would follow him, not only those who needed healing, but those who were attracted to such powers. And that gave Jesus a greater opportunity to preach to them the good news of the kingdom.

Regarding demons, they are mysterious creatures that are only mentioned twice in the Old Testament. Moses spoke of them once when he was prophesying the future apostasy of the sons of Israel: **“They moved him to jealousy with strange gods. With abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not God, to gods that they**

knew not, to new gods that came up of late, which your fathers did not dread” (Deuteronomy 32:16-17).

The other time they are mentioned is in a psalm that describes the past apostasy of the sons of Israel: **“Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan. And the land was polluted with blood”** (Psalm 106:37-38).

Demons are mentioned eighty-four times in the New Testament. We know very little about them. They were evil spirits that were somehow able to inhabit some people (through no fault of the victims). They were apparently like the germs we know about in modern times. Being possessed by a demon or demons meant the body of a man was afflicted in some kind of way. The following description of their effects was taken from an article on the website <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=120>:

The physical and/or mental effects occurring in certain individuals as a consequence of being possessed by a demon or demons (more than one could indwell a person; Mary Magdalene had once been inhabited by seven demons—Luke 8:2) were varied. Some demoniacs were afflicted with blindness and/or the inability to speak (Matthew 9:32; 12:22). Some thus possessed might be prone to violent convulsions. A case recorded by all three synoptic writers tells of a young man who was “epileptic.” He suffered grievously, frequently falling into the fire or into water (Matthew 17:15). He was dashed to the ground and bruised badly (Mark 9:18; Luke 9:39); he foamed at the mouth, ground his teeth, and “pineth away” (Mark 9:18). This final descriptive may suggest that the boy’s body became rigid so that he was incapable of motion (Arndt and Gingrich, 1967, p. 550). A demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee had excessive strength. He often had been bound with chains and fetters, but he had broken these restraints into pieces, and no one had the power to tame him (cf. also Acts 19:16). Further, he was characterized by both emotional illness and antisocial behavior (e.g., he wore no clothes—Luke 8:27), but when Christ purged the demon from the poor fellow he was observed “clothed, and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15).

Demons frequently afflicted people during the time of Christ. Whether they still afflict them is not known. I speak more about demons and evil spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus’ sermon on the mount

- **And having seen the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. And when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And having opened his mouth, he taught them, saying ...** (Matthew 5:1-2).

That begins what we now call his sermon on the mount. It is the most lengthy and varied collection of lessons he gave in one place that was recorded anywhere in the New Testament. Notice how Jesus did not give those lessons to the multitudes that followed him. He gave them only to his disciples. For most in the multitudes were not his disciples.

Matthew farther on tells why Jesus taught the multitudes differently from his disciples: **“Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes, and he did not speak to them independent of a parable ...”** (Matthew 13:34). Earlier his disciples asked him why. He answered them, **“Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him”** (Matthew 13:10-12).

Therefore, do not assume that all of the things Jesus taught in his sermon on the mount were intended for all peoples. They are indeed for all peoples who want to obey God. But unrepentant sinners are rebels against him, and they do not care what God wants of us. Therefore, the commands he gave were for those who belong to him. For example, higher ranking military officers should be saluted. But that does not apply to those who are not in the military. I explain those things more clearly farther on.

The Beatitudes

- **... blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, because they will obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God** (Matthew 5:3-9).

The first words of Jesus' sermon on the mount are what we call the Beatitudes, which means pronouncements of blessings. Those blessings will be given to all who have the virtues associated with them. The above passage gives the first seven of them, which I list below:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs.**
- Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted.**
- Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth.**
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.**
- Blessed are the merciful, because they will obtain mercy.**
- Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God.**
- Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God.**

Being poor in spirit and being meek both refer to humbleness. Jesus may have given the double blessing for humbleness because that seems to be the most important characteristic of those who belong to God. For Jesus often referred to his disciples as being his sheep. For example, on one occasion after his resurrection Jesus commanded Peter three times to feed his sheep and his lambs (see John 21:15-17). Jesus said the kingdom of the heavens was theirs, and they will inherit the earth, meaning the new heaven and earth after this one.

Only the humble can become disciples of Christ to inherit eternal life and be with God in the new Jerusalem of heaven. Consider this passage: **“In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens? And having called**

in a child, Jesus set it in the midst of them. And he said, Truly I say to you, if ye are not turned, and become as children, ye will, no, not enter into the kingdom of the heavens. He therefore who will make himself lowly as this child, this man is the greater in the kingdom of the heavens. And whoever will receive one such child in my name receives me" (Matthew 18:1-5).

The blessing for those who mourn refers to those who willingly endure suffering for the cause of God and his righteousness. Suffering for righteousness is another requirement that is necessary to qualify for entrance into the glories of heaven where there will never be any suffering, only happiness and joy. Indeed, Paul said, **"The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us"** (Romans 8:16-18).

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because they will be filled. They will be filled not only with righteousness but with the benefits that righteousness brings with it. For Solomon said, **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"** (Proverbs 14:34).

Mercy refers to showing kindness to those who are either in need or who are guilty of something. Nevertheless, our mercy should be discerning, not indiscriminate. As Jude said, **"But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. And on some be ye merciful—being discerning"** (Jude 1:20-22). And consider these words of James: **"For the judgment is without mercy to him who did no mercy"** (James 2:13). There are some people who are unworthy of receiving mercy; give them none. Be wise in how you apply each of Jesus' commands.

Being pure in heart means having a mind filled with thoughts that are noble, uplifting, constructive, edifying, good, right, and just. Jesus said that every man whose mind thinks that way will see God. Here are a few things Solomon said about men whose hearts are not pure: **"Fervent lips and a wicked heart are an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross. He who hates masquerades with his lips, but he lays up deceit within him. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly shown before the assembly"** (Proverbs 26:23-26).

Peacemakers are those who try to end strife, and try to reconcile people. There will always be conflicts of some kind between people. Peacemakers try to help resolve them when they are able. Remember however, true peace can only come with the defeat of sin and wickedness. Hence, part of being a peacemaker is to combat sin.

Peacemakers will be called sons of God for at least two reasons. One is because God is a peacemaker. Jesus demonstrated that throughout his life. Remember however, peace can only come with the defeat of sin and wickedness. That is why Jesus was actively opposed to sin, even though he was a man of peace. A second reason is because genuine peacemakers will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Persecuted for righteousness

- **Blessed are those who have been persecuted because of righteousness, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. Blessed are ye when they revile you, and persecute you, and say every evil word, being deceitful against you because of me. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, because your reward is great in the heavens, for so they persecuted the prophets before you (Matthew 5:10-12).**

The last two blessings that Jesus gave in the Beatitudes were for those who are persecuted because of righteousness. And those blessings are even greater than the others. For those who are persecuted because of righteousness Jesus first said the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. Jesus earlier said the same thing about the poor in spirit: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs.”**

Remember how Jesus gave a double blessing for the humble: the poor in spirit and the meek. And now he gives a double blessing for those who are persecuted because of righteousness. Not only is the kingdom of the heavens ours, but Jesus even said we should rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because our reward is great in the heavens.

Notice how Jesus also said that all the prophets had been persecuted before us. Stephen also said the same thing to the rulers of the Jews just before they killed him: **“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it” (Acts 7:51-53).**

Also when Paul spoke about persecution to Timothy, he said, **“But thou have closely followed my doctrine, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra. I endured such persecutions, and the Lord rescued me out of them all. And also all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (Second Timothy 3:10-12).** Therefore, we should be prepared for persecution, because Paul said that all those who want to live devoutly in Christ will be persecuted.

Alexander Campbell was a major contributor to the restoration of the church of Christ in the early nineteenth century. He said this about being persecuted for righteousness:

When opposed by the interested, by those whom the corruptions of Christianity feed with bread and gratify with honor, I will call to mind the history of all the benefactors of men, and draw both comfort and strength from the remembrance that no man ever achieved any great good to mankind who did not wrest it with violence through ranks of opponents—who did not fight for it with courage and perseverance, and who did not, in the conflict, sacrifice either his good name or his life.

John the harbinger of the Messiah, lost his head [king Herod took it from him]. The Apostles were slaughtered. The Savior was crucified. The ancient confessors were slain. The [protestant] reformers all have been excommunicated. I know that we shall do little good if we are not persecuted. If I am not traduced, slandered, and misrepresented, I shall be a most unworthy advocate of that cause which has always provoked

the resentment of those who have fattened upon the ignorance and superstition of the mass, and have been honored by the stupidity and sottishness of those who cannot think and will not learn.

But we have not a few friends and associates in this cause. There are many with whom it shall be my honor to live and labor, and my happiness to suffer and die.¹

Whenever we are persecuted for righteousness, remember what Jesus said: **“Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, because your reward is great in the heavens, for so they persecuted the prophets before you.”**

Being an influence for good

- **Ye are the salt material of the earth. But if the salt material becomes ineffective, by what will it be salted? It is potent for nothing further, except to be cast outside and to be trodden down by men.**
- **Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid, nor do they light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the lampstand, and it shines to all in the house. Thus your light should shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in the heavens (Matthew 5:13-16).**

Salt not only adds seasoning and flavoring to foods, but it also adds an important nutrient for our bodies. And it does not take much salt to be effective. Jesus also compared our influence to that of leaven, when he said, **“The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which having taken, a woman hid in three measures of meal until it was all leavened”** (Matthew 13:33). In the same way as salt and leaven, although the genuine disciples of Christ are a small minority in the world, our good influence can have a great positive effect. Therefore, be not discouraged about our smallness, but always apply your goodness whenever there are opportunities. Follow the steps of our Savior.

Regarding salt material, men in those days apparently did not have pure salt available to them. I am told they probably used some kind of inert rock that contained salt which was dissolved in water for cooking. That would explain why Jesus said that after it lost its saltiness it would be good for nothing, except to be cast out and trodden down by men.

Regarding any source of light, it is useless to us unless it is made visible. Likewise our good actions should be made visible so that we can influence others in good ways, and encourage them to glorify God. We must be humble and lowly, but still let our light shine so the world can see our good works. Seeing our good works—our productivity and industriousness—will encourage them to glorify our Father in the heavens, because our good works are a result of our faith and obedience to him.

1. Alexander Campbell, “Prefatory Remarks,” THE MILLENIAL HARBINGER, Bethany, Virginia: January 4, 1830, Volume 1, Number 1.

Law and righteousness

- **Think not that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I came not to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth pass away, one iota or one tittle will, no, not pass away from the law, until all things come to pass.**
- **Whoever therefore may relax one of these least commandments, and may teach men so, he will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens. But whoever may do and may teach them, this man will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens.**
- **For I say to you, that unless your righteousness abounds more than of the scholars and Pharisees, ye will, no, not enter into the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 5:17-20).**

Jesus taught his disciples many things beyond the laws of Moses. And he is here telling them that the lessons he was teaching were not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. It was only after his ascension into heaven that the law of Moses began to be phased out.

Indeed, the author of the book of Hebrews told how God would eventually supplant the law of Moses. He first quoted a prophecy: **“Because this is the covenant that I will ordain with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, giving my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be to them for a God, and they will be to me for a people.**

“And they will, no, not teach each man his fellow citizen, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because all will know me, from their small as far as their great. Because I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins and their lawlessness I will no, not further remember” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The author of Hebrews then said, **“In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance” (Hebrews 8:10-13).**

That process of obsolescence began when the church was established on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. The law of Moses only remained in effect in Israel because the rulers of the Jews, who rejected the Christ, kept it as their law of the land. However, God totally abolished that system by sending the Roman army to destroy their country in AD 70, forty years after Jesus began his ministry.

During his ministry on the earth Jesus emphasized the importance of obeying all the law and the prophets (meaning the teachings of the Old Testament). And as the passage in Matthew says, Jesus told how those who obeyed those laws and taught them would be called great in the kingdom of the heavens, while those who did not obey them or teach them would be called least in the kingdom of the heavens.

Generalizing from that lesson, it seems clear that those who likewise obey the commands of Christ and teach them will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens, while those who disobey them and fail to teach them will be called the least in the kingdom of the heavens. The difference in being great or least in the kingdom of the heavens is evidence that there will be degrees of reward in heaven among those who are saved.

Regarding these words, **“Think not that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I came not to abolish, but to fulfill.”** The teaching of Jesus (and his apostles) was the climax of the word of God for us. What he taught did not supplant everything in the Old Testament. For there is much truth and wisdom contained there. The teachings of Jesus fulfilled them.

For example, although the legal system of the law of Moses was abolished, it contains much wisdom about laws for nations and how they should apply them. There would be much more peace and justice in America if our laws followed that wisdom.

Another example is the wisdom of Solomon that is contained in his three books of the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. And that wisdom is always valuable. Indeed, Solomon said about it, **“Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote thee. She will bring thee to honor when thou embrace her. She will give to thy head a garland of grace, a crown of beauty she will deliver to thee”** (Proverbs 4:7-9).

The teachings of Jesus fulfilled and completed the word of God for man. Therefore, reject every other teaching about God and his will for us that claims to be divinely inspired. If it is not found in the Bible it is not the word of God. Beware!

Jesus also warned the people that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scholars and the Pharisees or they would not even get into the kingdom of the heavens. As the record shows many times, the scholars and the Pharisees were very hypocritical. They pretended outwardly to be very righteous, but inwardly they were very sinful. Hence, there were times when Jesus rebuked them severely.

Here is one example: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”** (Matthew 23:27-28).

Regarding the double negative “no, not” in what Jesus said about entering into the kingdom of the heavens, that is precisely how the original Greek reads. Therefore, I translated the words that way. That word pair occurs ninety-seven times in the New Testament, many of which were in the words of Jesus himself.

Hostility toward a brother

- **Ye have heard that it was said to them in old times, Thou shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to the judgment. But I say to you, that every man who is angry at his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment, and whoever speaks an insult to his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, Foolish man, will be liable to the hell of fire** (Matthew 5:21-22).

That passage is the first of several commandments Jesus gave in his sermon that began with **“Ye have heard that it was said ...”** However, unlike what many people believe, Jesus never intended to contrast his commandments with what the people already had.

When he reminded them that murder was against the law, he extended that law with a general principle. That principle warns of the dangers of any hostility toward a brother.

Besides murder, which is the ultimate act of hostility against someone, Jesus mentioned three acts of hostility to a brother that we should not do: (1) being angry at him without a cause, (2) speaking an insult to him, and (3) saying to him "Foolish man." All of those acts reflect a lack of love. And Jesus said to his disciples, **"A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other. By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other"** (John 13:34-35).

Jesus said that simply being angry toward a brother without cause puts us in danger of the judgment, meaning the final judgment in the afterlife. For the apostle John said, **"If any man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar"** (First John 4:20). Anger toward a brother without a cause will be condemned in the afterlife even though it is not a crime in this world. It is not a crime in the eyes of men, but it is a serious sin in the eyes of God. Therefore, resist it, and let it not cause you to offend God. Always love your fellow Christians, and seek to peacefully resolve disputes and controversies with them.

Speaking an insult to a brother makes us liable to being charged in court with slander. And slander is a major quality of the devil. Indeed, the very meaning of the word devil is slanderer. When we love our fellow Christians as we should we would not want to speak an insult to them. For speaking an insult to them is a form of verbal assault. If they become guilty of something, the most we should do is to rebuke them. Therefore, we should never speak an insult to a brother in Christ.

Even worse than speaking an insult is to berate a fellow Christian. To berate is an act of hatred. And that puts us in danger of being cast into hell. For John also said, **"Every man hating his brother is a man-killer. And ye know that no man-killer has eternal life abiding in him"** (First John 3:15). Hating a brother destroys the affectionate unity that God wants us to have with each other. Therefore, in the sight of God it is like murder. Remember that if you are tempted to berate a brother.

Regarding the matter of calling a brother a foolish man, that is not strictly forbidden. It all depends upon how and why the expression is used. For example, Paul said to the brothers at Galatia, **"O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was earlier described among you, crucified?"** (Galatians 3:1). Paul applied it to them because he loved them, and he wanted to awaken them to the foolishness they were doing about the good news of Christ.

We are not bound to a legal system with God. For example, Paul said, **"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under control by anything"** (First Corinthians 6:12). Therefore, beware of applying the commands of Christ in a strictly literal and legalistic way.

Moreover remember, what Jesus meant by a brother was not every man. He meant every man who was a fellow Christian, a member of the kingdom of the heavens, which is also called his church. However, if a Christian completely forsakes Christ, and becomes his enemy and lives wickedly, we can then hate such a man because he is no longer a brother.

God casts out such men and he even hates them. Evidence of that is what Jehovah said about the ancient Israelites: **“All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them. Because of the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more. All their rulers are rebels”** (Hosea 9:15). Even so, however, such a man could still repent and turn back to Christ, although it would be very difficult for him.

Be reconciled with thy brother

- **If therefore thou should bring thy gift to the altar, and remember there that thy brother has anything against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then, after coming, bring thy gift** (Matthew 5:23-24).

Jesus is here speaking about having knowledge that a brother has something against us. If we know about it, then it is our responsibility to go to him and seek reconciliation. We are not expected to go to a brother who may harbor something against us without our knowledge. Such a man makes himself guilty, because farther in the book of Matthew, Jesus commanded us to go to every brother who sins against us and seek reconciliation (see Matthew 18:15-17). Both the brother who was offended and the brother who offended him were to go to each other and seek reconciliation.

Jesus told the people that reconciliation with brothers was even more important than bringing gifts to the altar. And that means the reconciliation of brothers is more important than any kind of worship ritual. In the sight of God the value of unity among us excels that of all ceremonies.

Oh, that every disciple of Christ had those values. Believers in Christ are now greatly divided because their hearts are hardened against each other. They refuse to seek reconciliation. The only kind of reconciliation they will accept is to agree to remain divided by ignoring the word of God, and living by this evil standard: “Let us all agree to disagree,” which means to tolerate differences in doctrine for the sake of peace.

Paul condemned that kind of thinking, when he said to the brothers at Galatia, **“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him who called you in the grace of Christ to another good news, which is not another, except there are some who confuse you, and who want to pervert the good news of the Christ. But even if we, or an agent from heaven, should preach a good news to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, I now also say again, if any man preaches a good news to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed”** (Galatians 1:6-9).

Incidentally, the first man to publish the words “Let us agree to disagree” was John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination. The expression “Let us agree to disagree” was soon changed to “Let us agree to differ” in order to remove the apparent contradiction in the statement. Nevertheless, the principle of those words is still evil.

Be reconciled with thine opponents

- **Be agreeing with thine opponent quickly, while thou are with him on the way, lest the opponent deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee**

to the subordinate, and thou will be cast into prison. Truly I say to thee, thou will, no, not come out from there, until thou have paid the last quadrans (Matthew 5:25-26).

Again Jesus emphasized the importance of reconciliation. And the command he gave above is more than just good advice about settling worldly disputes. For I believe it refers more broadly to the much more important task of being reconciled to God. And that can only be done through our redemption by Jesus Christ. If we do not become followers of Jesus, there will be no forgiveness of any of our sins. We will pay the price for every one of them, including the smallest. I conjecture about how that will be done in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul later wrote to condemn having any lawsuits in worldly courts among us as disciples of Christ. For he said to the congregation at Corinth, **“Dare any of you, having a matter against the other, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the sanctified? Or know ye not that the sanctified will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy of very small legal disputes?”** (First Corinthians 6:1-2).

A quadrans is said to have been worth less than an American penny.

Adultery

- **Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, that every man who looks on a woman to crave her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).**

As with murder, Jesus did not abolish the law against adultery; he extended it. Not only is the physical act of adultery forbidden, but the very desire of doing it is forbidden. Jesus did not contrast his commands with laws like the ten commandments. Instead he extended their application. He made them stricter, not looser. He applied them to our thoughts as well as to our behavior.

Regarding forbidden desires, they almost always lead to forbidden acts. The more a man imagines committing a sin in his heart, the easier it becomes for him to commit the sin. For when the temptation comes, the man has less resistance to it. He has already been doing the sin in his heart.

Therefore, combat every evil thought in your heart the way you would combat parasites that attempt to prey upon your body. When you think such thoughts, do what you can to cast them out of your mind. Sometimes it may take extra effort and time, but you must never tolerate them in your thoughts. That is one reason why we should avoid temptations, because they tend to arouse evil thoughts in our hearts.

Sacrificing your body to save your soul

- **And if thy right eye causes thee to stumble, remove it and cast it from thee, for it is advantageous for thee that one of thy body-parts should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causes thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee, for it is advantageous for thee that**

one of thy body-parts should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell (Matthew 5:29-30).

The right eye and the right hand of the body are among its most valuable parts. Nevertheless, even they should be sacrificed if they cause a man to stumble and be condemned to hell. Making such a willful sacrifice would take great motivation. What is crucial to such a decision is if a man knew his life was dependent upon it.

Virtually every day there are cases of having parts of the body removed or amputated by surgeons to save a person's life. However, in recent times there was reported the case of a man who literally cut off his own hand to save his life. His hand had become trapped by a fallen boulder while he was alone in a remote mountain wilderness. Being alone, the only way he could save himself was to use his knife to cut it off. Otherwise he would have experienced a lingering death. If people only knew how much greater suffering there is in hell they would indeed cast off whatever would cause them to be cast there.

Divorce

- **And it was said, Whoever may divorce his wife, let him give her a divorce certificate. But I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife apart from a matter of fornication, disposes her to commit adultery, and whoever may marry her who has been divorced commits adultery** (Matthew 5:31-32).

The lessons Jesus gave during his sermon on the mount were for his disciples, not for the rest of the world. It should be remembered that every man who remains an unrepentant sinner is already condemned to hell. And sinners do not care what Jesus commands. These teachings of Jesus are much stricter than the laws of nations that are enforced by worldly authorities. Therefore, even though it may be legal to divorce a wife for many causes, for the disciples of Christ it is wrong to divorce her except for only the one cause that Jesus gave.

And that cause is the guilt of fornication, which I believe applies both before and after marriage. In other words, if a Christian woman violates her virginity before marriage, she can be divorced by her Christian husband after she marries. (Although I am sure he has the choice of keeping her.) That danger shows how important it is for a woman to remain a virgin until she marries. And, of course, adultery has always been condemned by God. That is another example of how Jesus extended the severity of the law.

There are at least two reasons for a woman to remain a virgin before marriage, because sexual intimacy has two main purposes: one is to bring new souls into the world, and the other is to strengthen the bond of matrimony. When a woman commits fornication before marriage she risks bearing a bastard. And that not only ruins the woman's reputation, but it is a terrible burden the child must endure throughout his life.

When bastardy is dismissed or looked upon lightly, that is a symptom of deep moral degeneracy in the society. Bastardy must be branded a serious moral infraction in order to discourage it. Since America abandoned God and his righteousness, one of every three children are now born bastards. Among the negro population the number is twice as many, two of every three.

America is becoming a nation of bastards. And the consequences have brought a great increase in lawlessness. One example is the development of many dangerous gangs of young men in our cities. Healthy marriage is necessary for a healthy society.

Adultery also destroys the marriage bond, which God says was for the two of them to be as one flesh (see Genesis 2:24)). Therefore, Ezekiel called adulteresses murderers, because they destroy that oneness of flesh: **“And righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands”** (Ezekiel 23:45).

It is very rare to have the kind of oneness that God wants in a marriage after adultery has been committed. It creates a permanent scar in their hearts, both in the heart of the one who was guilty and in the heart of the one betrayed.

In the book of Malachi, the ancient Israelites were rebuked severely for marital infidelity: **“Ye cover the altar of Jehovah with tears, with weeping, and with sighing, insomuch that he does not regard the offering any more, nor receives it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Why?”**

“Because Jehovah has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou have dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did he not make one, although he had the residue of the Spirit? And why one?”

“He sought a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For I hate putting away [divorce], says Jehovah, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with violence, says Jehovah of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Malachi 2:13-16).

Malachi was speaking about how the marital infidelity of a man is treachery against the wife of his youth with which he made a covenant of faithfulness. Moreover, divorce is a form of treachery against her unless she was sexually unfaithful. God intended for marriage to be a form of oneness for life, one reason being because he **“sought a godly seed.”**

That tells how destructive divorce is to the rearing of righteous children. And the rebelliousness and lawlessness of the young in pagan America is a clear consequence of the disintegration of the institution of marriage. Which has been encouraged by such things as the no-fault divorce laws that result in excusing the guilty and punishing the innocent.

Regarding fornication before marriage, I remember reading about a man who said the memories of his past fornications prevented him from becoming fully intimate with his wife. He said those memories of his former intimacies kept intruding in his mind whenever he became sexually intimate with her. Therefore young reader, always resist the temptation of fornication. It will leave permanent scars in your heart and cause sorrows much greater and more enduring than its fleeting pleasures.

Making oaths

- **Again, ye have heard that it was said to them in old times, Thou shalt not swear falsely, but shall render to the Lord thine oaths. But I say to you, not**

to swear at all, neither by heaven, because it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, because it is the footstool of his feet, nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Neither shall thou swear by thy head, because thou cannot make one hair white or black. But let your word be, Yes, yes, No, no. And anything beyond these is from evil (Matthew 5:33-37).

Oaths are used as a way for a man to ensure that what he said is true. Oaths are not limited to the spoken word. Signatures are used to make agreements and contracts legally binding. Thus signatures are a modern form of an oath. They are used to ensure what is said is true. In court trials witnesses are required to swear to tell the truth. And failure to speak truthfully in a court of law is a crime called perjury.

Jesus mentioned swearing (1) by heaven, (2) by the earth, (3) by Jerusalem, and (4) by our head. Jesus said to not swear by heaven, because it is the throne of God. He said to not swear by the earth, because it is the footstool of his feet.

He said to not swear by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Jehovah is the great King, and Jerusalem was his city because that was where his temple was. He is the great King, because the psalmist said, **“For Jehovah Most High is awesome. He is a great King over all the earth”** (Psalm 47:2).

Jesus also said to not swear by our head, because we cannot make one hair white or black. People can dye their hair in different colors, but they cannot change its natural color as it grows from our head.

To swear is a solemn promise or declaration. It is common for people to swear by something they value highly or that is greater than themselves. They swear by such things to indicate the seriousness of their commitment to what they swear. The examples Jesus gave were apparently given to cover the spectrum of things to which men might swear, from the great to the small.

Jesus did not forbid making such oaths or swearing when required by the laws of the land. His command against it was for agreements among his disciples. He wants his disciples to be so truthful and reliable in what they say that making an oath is unnecessary. Our word is our bond. Indeed, our word should be considered even more reliable than any kind of oath. That is why Jesus said anything beyond our word is from evil. For using an oath implies that a man's word is not to be otherwise trusted.

The law of Moses did allow swearing, as these two passages show: **“Thou shall fear Jehovah thy God, and him thou shall serve, and shall swear by his name”** (Deuteronomy 6:13), and, **“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, and profane the name of thy God. I am Jehovah”** (Leviticus 19:12). Oaths were allowed in the law of Moses because it was a legal system for the nation of Israel, and such things as oaths are required when not all men are to be trusted. However, the word of faithful disciples of Christ is as good as or better than an oath, because we are a righteous people, being children of God.

Notice how the law of Moses said they were to swear by his name, meaning the name of Jehovah. And they were not to swear to it falsely, which would have profaned it. Before America chose to become pagan, witnesses in court trials and those who were being sworn into offices were required to say “so help me God” after making the oath.

Here is what the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says about that phrase:

The essence of the phrase is a request to divine agency to render assistance (help) by being a guarantor of the oath taker's own honesty and integrity in the matter under question, and by implication invoking divine displeasure if the oath taker fails in their duty in this regard. It therefore implies greater care than usual in the act of the performance of one's duty, such as in testimony to the facts of the matter in a court of law.

Ensure justice

- **Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, not to resist what is troublesome, but whoever will strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to the man who wants to sue thee, and take away thy coat, thou shall leave him thy cloak also. And whoever will draft thee for one mile, go thou with him two (Matthew 5:38-41).**

Other translations say that Jesus taught not to resist evil or an evil person. Those are mistranslations, and they have been the cause of countless miseries and sorrows. Those false translations make Jesus seem to teach pacifism. And pacifism is a form of surrender to evil men. The Bible has never taught such a thing, and Jesus did not teach it either.

As Jesus had done with murder and adultery, he taught his disciples to be willing to go beyond what the law required. What he said was that we should not resist doing things that are required of us just because they are troublesome. Instead we should be willing to go beyond what we were required for recompense.

If we deserve a slap on the cheek, be willing to offer the other one. He did not teach that we should allow assault against us unjustly. Remember, he was relating his teaching with the laws of exact retribution—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—which is justice. And if we justly deserve a slap, then offer to take two.

If we are sued in court and lose our case, then we should offer to give more than required. If we are drafted by authorities to perform some task, then we should do more than is required. Apparently the Romans had a law that their authorities could command any citizen to accompany them on their journey if they were needed, but only for one mile per person.

The lesson Jesus gave is that his disciples should have the reputation of being willing to go beyond the simple requirements of law and justice to be sure those requirements are met. We the disciples of Christ live by righteousness not legalisms.

Generosity

- **Give to him who asks thee, and turn thou not away from him who wants to borrow from thee (Matthew 5:42).**

That is another example of how interpreting what Jesus taught in a legalistic way leads to ridiculous conclusions. Interpreting his command literally to give to him who asks us would quickly lead every Christian into poverty. For wicked men would soon take everything we have, and laugh about what fools we are. There were many times when Jesus

refused requests. Indeed, he refused to answer king Herod when he was being tried. He not only refused to answer Herod's questions, but Jesus would not even speak to him.

The lesson in the above command is to be willing to consider other people's requests. We should not rebuff them at once, but consider the merits of who they are and what they are requesting. Jesus ignored Herod because he knew what a wicked man Herod was. And Herod did not deserve anything from Jesus.

And that reminds me of a story in the Old Testament. King Jehoram of the ten tribes of Israel and king Jehoshaphat of Judah joined forces to fight against the kings of three other countries. When they came to inquire of the prophet Elisha, Elisha said to king Jehoram, **"As Jehovah of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee"** (Second Kings 3:14). Jehoram was an idolater and an evil king.

Jesus even rebuked a man when he made a request of him. Here is the report about that: **"And a certain man out of the crowd said to him, Teacher, speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Watch, and keep away from greed, because to any man, life to him is not in the abundance of things possessed by him"** (Luke 12:13-15).

There are numerous examples to indicate the above command about giving was never intended to be interpreted literally and legalistically. God wants us to use wisdom and good judgment in all that we do, including how we apply his commandments.

Treatment of enemies

- **Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, so that ye may become sons of your Father in the heavens, because he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**
- **For if ye love those who love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the tax collectors the same? And if ye only greet your friends, what do ye extra? Do not even the tax collectors this way? Ye therefore shall be perfect, even as your Father in the heavens is perfect** (Matthew 5:43-48).

There is a command in the law of Moses to love thy neighbor, but not one to hate thine enemy. The command to hate thine enemy was an unauthorized addition made by the Jews. The Jews made many unauthorized additions to the laws that God gave them. And hatred toward enemies was part of those additions. For example, Peter said to the Gentile Cornelius, **"Ye understand how it is unlawful for a Jewish man to fraternize or to visit with a foreign man, and yet God demonstrated to me not to call one man profane or unclean"** (Acts 10:28).

That law of the Jews was never given by God. Indeed, the law of Moses commanded them to love the foreigners among them even as themselves: **"The stranger that sojourns with**

you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and thou shall love him as thyself, for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God” (Leviticus 19:34).

Nevertheless, the command to love our enemies has also been one of the most misunderstood and misapplied. It too has been used to promote pacifism, and a form of pacifism of the most diabolical kind. It has been used by deluded souls to excuse and forgive men who are guilty of the most heinous and cruel crimes imaginable. That kind of application is an extreme perversion of what Jesus actually taught.

The key to understanding his command is the meaning of the word enemy. Jesus was referring to law abiding men who happen to be our competitors, our rivals, or our disputants. Examples are these: men who are on opposing teams during sporting events; men who are members of different political parties; men who are competitors in business; and men who are adversaries in other lawful ways. It also includes those who resent us for various reasons, causing them to mistreat and persecute us, but only in ways that are not criminal.

The Bible teaches that criminal actions, including unlawful persecutions, must be prosecuted and punished by the proper authorities. For example, Paul said, **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves.**

“For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

Notice how Paul said that law enforcement authorities are helpers of God, **“vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil.”** And when law enforcement authorities fail to punish criminals justly, they are sinning against God by failing to be his helpers. And we sin against God when we forgive and excuse criminals who have offended us.

Jesus never included vicious lawless men in his command to love our enemies. Such men are not merely personal enemies, they are enemies of God. And we are not commanded to love such men. Indeed, the psalmist said about God, **“For thou are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil shall not sojourn with thee. The arrogant shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hate all workers of iniquity. Thou will destroy those who speak lies. Jehovah abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man”** (Psalm 5:4-6).

And here is what the prophet Malachi said about those who claim God loves evil workers: **“Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words. Yet ye say, How have we wearied him? In that ye say, Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delights in them ...”** (Malachi 2:17). It wearies God to say that he delights in evil doers; it is a lie of the devil and those deluded by him. God does not love everybody! Indeed, God hates **“all workers of iniquity.”**

The apostle Paul, before he was converted to Christ, he persecuted Christians severely. However, it was all done legally with the support of the Jewish rulers. He also did it with a clear (but misled) conscience. Paul was neither a criminal nor a hypocrite. Therefore, praying for Paul during the time he was an enemy of Christ and his church was the kind of thing Jesus commanded. And we too must pray for those kinds of enemies.

Also see my comments about Matthew 23:23: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites!”** A woe is a curse. And that is one example of how Jesus responded to his enemies, which we can use as an example for us.

Charity

- **Be careful not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them, otherwise ye have no reward from your Father in the heavens. When therefore thou do charity, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may have glory by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward.**
- **But when thou do charity, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand does, so that thy charity may be in secret. And thy Father who sees in secret will himself reward thee in the open** (Matthew 6:1-4).

God has always wanted us to share our blessings with those in need (those who are worthy of it). For example, there were commands in the law of Moses about helping the poor and the needy. Here is part of the law of Moses about the special third-year tithe for the needy, and about the special year of release from debts: **“At the end of every three years thou shall bring forth all the tithe of thine increase in the same year, and shall lay it up within thy gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with thee, and the sojourner, and the fatherless, and the widow, who are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied, that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all the work of thy hand which thou do.**

“At the end of every seven years thou shall make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor shall release that which he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it from his neighbor and his brother, because Jehovah’s release has been proclaimed. From a foreigner thou may exact it, but whatever of thine is with thy brother, thy hand shall release” (Deuteronomy 15:14:28-15:3).

Regarding the seven year release, I have no doubt that meant the debtor was not obligated to repay his debt during that seventh year. That law did not mean the debtor was not required to pay the debt at all. That seventh year was simply a way to give a debtor that time of reprieve from his obligation. That would help enable him to strengthen his financial situation so he could pay the debt more easily.

Regarding the tithe, nowhere in the New Testament are the disciples of Christ commanded to tithe. We are under the law of liberty toward God (see James 2:12). And God has given us the freedom to use our own judgment about our giving. When to give, how much to give, to whom to give, are all for us to decide, as long as we are guided by the Spirit of Christ in us.

What Jesus said there in his sermon on the mount is not only about how to give charity. It was also a rebuke against those who give hypocritically. Jesus hates hypocrisy. And men who make a big display when giving charity are hypocrites. Their main motive is not to help those in need. Their motive is to gain an enhanced reputation among men. They are really aggrandizing themselves when they make such public displays of their charity.

Instead of broadcasting our charity Jesus commanded us give privately, not letting the left hand know what the right hand does. That means when we give charity we should only inform those who are involved with it. What would be the purpose of informing others except to seek praise from them? It is praise from God that we should seek, not the praise of men. And Jesus said when we give charity in private, we will receive praise from him.

Notice how Jesus said the hypocrites who made public displays of their charity had received their reward. They gave because they sought the praises of men. Hence, the praise they received from men was their reward. God rewards those who give in secret. And Jesus said that God would reward us in the open.

That means our reward from him will be seen publicly. It will definitely be seen on the great day of judgment. But it will also be seen in this life by the blessings we receive. Solomon spoke about that, when he said, **“There is he who scatters, and increases yet more, and there he is who withholds more than is proper, but only to want”** (Proverbs 11:24).

Praying in private

- **And when thou pray, thou shall not be as the hypocrites, because they love to pray having stood in the synagogues and in the corners of the thoroughfares, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou pray, enter into thy private room, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father who sees in secret will reward thee in the open** (Matthew 6:5-6).

With that command Jesus was referring to personal prayers. There is nothing wrong with public prayers in places like church assemblies. Also, as with all of his commands, it should not be applied in a strict and rigid legalistic way. There are going to be times when a man needs to pray, but there is no opportunity for privacy. Jesus was not condemning those kinds of circumstances. As he stated, he was condemning the motives of the hypocrites. And in order to avoid the impression of hypocrisy, we should make our personal prayers in private, unless there is no opportunity for it.

Make no vain repetitions

- **And while praying do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard by their much speaking. Be not therefore like them, for your Father knows what things ye have need of before ye ask him** (Matthew 6:7-8).

When I was in the US Navy I was stationed for a while in Rhode Island. And I remember listening on the radio there to a Roman Catholic priest praying about Mary the mother of

Jesus. He repeated the same words over and over for several minutes. That is a good example of using vain repetitions. His prayer seemed to me was not really speaking to God, but was a kind of ritual sermon for the listeners. And I have heard other prayers in churches that also seemed to be more like sermons to the people instead of requests to God.

You might ask, if God knows what things we have need of before we ask him, then why do we need to ask? Why pray if God already knows? The reason is because everything he commands us to do is for our benefit. When we pray we are reminding ourselves that God is the source of our blessings. Moreover, when we pray as we ought our thoughts are upon him. As disciples of Christ, he is our heavenly Father. And we can speak to him as a father.

Furthermore, when we pray we can be blessed beyond what things we need. For example, James said, **“Ye do not have, because ye do not ask”** (James 4:2). When we pray we can ask for special blessings, and he has promised to answer us as long as what we ask is according to his will. That means as long as what we ask are for things that are good and right and just, as well as wise for us.

An example of prayer for us

- **Pray ye therefore this way: Our Father in the heavens, hallowed be thy name. May thy kingdom come. May thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven. Give us this day the bread sufficient for us. And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, because from thee is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Truly** (Matthew 6:9-13).

After Jesus gave his commands about how we should pray, he gave an example. That particular prayer has come to be called “the Lord’s prayer.” Notice how brief it is. There seems to be a human tendency to make long prayers in public, but the Lord’s prayer was brief and concise.

Nevertheless, long prayers are not necessarily condemned, because there are times when they are appropriate. An example of a long prayer is the one Jesus made during the time of the last supper with his apostles (see John 17). The example of a prayer that Jesus gave in the above passage is only seventy-one words long, while his prayer at the time of the last supper was six hundred and fifty-two words long, almost ten times longer.

Here are the parts to the Lord’s prayer in the above passage:

**Our Father in the heavens, hallowed be thy name.
May thy kingdom come.
May thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven.
Give us this day the bread sufficient for us.
And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.
And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, because from thee is
the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Truly.**

To hallow means to honor as sacred. That is one reason why one of the ten commandments forbade taking God’s name in vain: **“Thou shall not take the name of Jehovah thy**

God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). Taking God’s name in vain is very common in this most adulterous generation of Americans. They use it as a common expletive. But that is making them guilty before God, and he will punish them. Beware lest the evil habits of the world cause you to become guilty before God.

Jesus prayed that God’s kingdom would come. That has now happened. It came when Peter preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. That was the day the church, the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, was established. Hence, it is foolish for people to recite the Lord’s prayer with that part in it. Jesus did not command us to pray that prayer. He said, **“Pray ye therefore this way:”** Which means to pray similar to that prayer, not exactly like it.

Jesus prayed that the will of God happen on the earth as it is in heaven. God’s will is done in heaven because he does not tolerate sin there. Peter gave evidence of that, when he said, **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into a place of punishment being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4). If mankind wants to make the world more like heaven, then they need to obey the will of God as is done in heaven.

God is tolerating sin in this world because he is testing our souls to choose those who make themselves worthy to become his sons for eternity. He is separating the sheep from the goats; he is separating the wheat from the chaff; he is choosing those who prove they have genuine faith in him and love for him from those who do not.

We all need regular nourishment from the things we eat. And except during times of fasting, we almost always eat more than once each day. Each day we need the bread sufficient for us, bread referring to any kind of nutritious food. And we need to keep reminding ourselves that God is he who supplies that food. Men have yet to invent artificial foods that can sustain our bodies. We cultivate the land, we plant and care for the crops, we harvest and process them, but God causes the plants to grow, and that is the hardest part, impossible for us.

Regarding our debts to God, we owe our very lives to him, as well as the world itself. He created them all. However, in his prayer (quoted above) Jesus is referring to the debts we make when we sin against God. You see, every sin creates harm of some kind, more or less, sooner or later. And that requires just recompense, which is the debt we create when we sin. Jesus told us to ask God to forgive our debts to him in the same way we also forgive the debts of those who sin against us. I say much more about forgiveness in my comments about what Jesus says about it next.

Jesus also told us to ask that God not bring us into temptation but deliver us from evil. It is inevitable that we are going to face temptations and evils. However, we should never seek situations where we will be tempted or experience evil. It is foolish to expose yourself unnecessarily to things that will tempt you or cause evil to you. Instead, we should ask God to help us avoid temptations and evils. And then let him decide when it would be good if we faced those things. But when it happens, follow the steps of Jesus and resist the best way you can, asking God to help you endure.

Whenever you can, be like Joseph the son of Jacob, and flee temptation. Joseph’s sinful brothers sold him into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and became a slave to an officer of

Pharaoh. Here is the story of how Joseph was tempted by that officer's wife: **"And it came to pass, after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said to his master's wife, Behold, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand. He is not greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"**

"And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not hearken to her, to lie by her, or to be with her. And it came to pass, about this time, that he went into the house to do his work, and there was none of the men of the house there inside. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got out" (Genesis 39:7-12).

Afterward, in a rage the woman lied and falsely accused him, and so her husband cast Joseph into prison. Yet Joseph still kept his faith in God. And eventually, after several years, God raised Joseph to be the second in command of all Egypt. The story of Joseph is one of the most inspiring in the Bible.

Jesus ended his sample prayer by praising God. He confessed that the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God the Father. And those things are from him into the ages, meaning every age that will ever be. The kingdom Jesus meant is the kingdom of the heavens, which is the kingdom of God, which in the world is also called the church.

Forgiving

- **For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses** (Matthew 6:14-15).

As with blessing our enemies, forgiveness needs to be done with discretion. For example, we have no right to forgive wicked lawless men. Authorities have the God-given responsibility to punish them with justice. For Paul said, **"If possible from you, keeping peace with all men, not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord"** (Romans 12:19).

And regarding how God avenges, Paul said, **"Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves."**

"For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou wilt have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil" (Romans 13:1-4).

The popular idea that we have the right, even the duty to forgive everyone is a false one. Another false but popular idea is that forgiveness means eliminating all punishment. There are numerous examples in the Bible that disprove that idea. Forgiveness as taught in the

Bible means to not completely reject the person. One simple example is how God punished Moses by not allowing him to go into the promised land. Moses had been so provoked by the rebellious Israelites, that in a moment of weakness he rashly disobeyed Jehovah about the way he was to get water from a rock.

Later Moses pleaded with God to allow him to go in. However, Jehovah said to him, **“It shall be enough for thee. Speak no more to me of this matter. Get thee up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with thine eyes, for thou shalt not go over this Jordan”** (Deuteronomy 3:26-27). God forgave Moses by not rejecting him, but he still punished him for his sin.

Another example concerns the Israelites in the wilderness. They had provoked Jehovah to anger many times. And when they heard a report about how strong the people in their promised land were, they refused to enter it, and instead they sought to stone Moses. Here is how Jehovah responded: **“How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, for all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a nation greater and mightier than they”** (Numbers 14:11-12).

After Moses pleaded for God to forgive them, Jehovah said, **“I have pardoned according to thy word, but in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah, because all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have challenged me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of them who despised me see it.**

“But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and has followed me fully, him will I bring into the land into which he went, and his seed shall possess it. Now the Amalekite and the Canaanite dwell in the valley. Tomorrow turn ye, and get you into the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea” (Numbers 14:20-25).

Jehovah forgave the people by not destroying them, but they were still punished severely. I say much more about forgiveness in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Fasting

- **And when ye fast, become not like the gloomy looking hypocrites, for they make their faces unsightly, so that they may appear fasting to men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But when thou fast, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, so that thou may not appear fasting to men, but to thy Father in secret. And thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee** (Matthew 6:16-18).

As with charity and prayer, our fasting should not be done to make an impression upon other people. As with charity and prayer, Jesus commanded us to do things to conceal our fasting. Fasting is rarely done during these spiritually degenerate times. The people have become too fat and gluttonous to want to fast. In fact, obesity has become a national plague. Many of them piously talk about a national day of prayer, but never about a

national day of fasting. Prayers are easy and pious appearing, but fasting is difficult, especially when it is done secretly without the awareness of others.

Nevertheless remember, fasting is not commanded us by Christ. And even for the people of Israel God only commanded fasting for one day each year, which was the day of atonement for their sins. Fasting can be healthy for both the body and the spirit, but it is always optional. Actually, skipping a single meal can be called a fast if it is done for that purpose.

Storing our treasures

- **Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust deteriorates, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust deteriorates, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also** (Matthew 6:19-21).

It takes a great deal of faith to lay up our treasures in the invisible world of heaven instead of on the earth where we can see and enjoy them now. Nevertheless, as I heard one financial adviser say, "Investments that have no risk would be the only investments to make." For every earthly treasure can be lost. Indeed, Solomon said, **"Weary not thyself to be rich. Out of thine own wisdom, cease. Will thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For it certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward heaven"** (Proverbs 23:4-5). As examples, Jesus said our treasures can deteriorate or be stolen from us. And in our modern times things like electronic devices can quickly become obsolete and virtually useless. The treasures of this world are truly unreliable things.

Paul also spoke about the uncertainty of earthly wealth, when he said to Timothy, **"Command the rich in the present age not to be arrogant, nor hope in the uncertainty of wealth, but in the living God, who supplies us all things abundantly for enjoyment, to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for that which is coming, so that they may take hold of the eternal life"** (First Timothy 6:17-19).

What Jesus said about storing our treasures also provides evidence for what is called degrees of reward in heaven. For he said that those who store their treasures in heaven will have more there when this life is over.

The lamp of the body

- **The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye is sound, thy whole body will be bright. But if thine eye is bad, thy whole body will be dark. If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness!** (Matthew 6:22-23).

As in the above scripture, Jesus sometimes spoke in words that were challenging to understand, but rich in meaning. In the literal sense, our sensory organs are the sources of our knowledge and awareness. And if they work well then we can learn and develop our intellect. Otherwise we cannot; we would remain ignorant and mentally stunted. And that is probably the worst of all of the handicaps.

It is the same way with the eye of our mind. For if the information we receive is limited and distorted, then our intellect is going to be severely limited and undeveloped. Therefore, it is extremely important to acquire accurate and complete knowledge. Otherwise we become ignorant slaves. We become slaves to false knowledge. That is the main reason why all tyrants without exception do everything they can to keep their subjects ignorant of the truth. A blind man that is well educated is actually much better off than a seeing man who is ignorant.

Those things are why Jesus told how a sound eye of the intellect makes the whole body bright, while a bad eye of the intellect makes the whole body dark. And That kind of mental darkness is the worse kind, for he said, **“how great is the darkness.”**

God or mammon

- **No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or he will hold to one, and disparage the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon** (Matthew 6:24).

It is impossible to be a servant or an employee of two different men at the same time. Another application of that truism, is the fact it is impossible for a woman to live under the authority of two husbands. That is why polygamy is always polygyny: one man having more than one wife.

The application that Jesus made about two masters was about serving both God and riches. It cannot be done. Indeed, you cannot commit your love to any of the things of this world. For you will either love God and hate the things of this world, or you will love the things of this world and hate God. As the apostle John said, **“Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (First John 2:15).

Mammon refers to worshiping wealth. I once read a book many years ago about how to become wealthy. The author had succeeded, and he said what was absolutely necessary was to pursue wealth at all costs. He said the quest for wealth must supersede every other effort. He had learned the truth of what Jesus said.

Later in Matthew, Jesus said to his disciples, **“Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of the heavens difficultly”** (Matthew 19:23). We cannot serve God and mammon. That lesson is also given in Luke, which adds this information about what happened after Jesus said those words: **“And the Pharisees, being lovers of money, heard all these things, and they sneered him”** (Luke 16:14). Those Pharisees could not love Jesus while they still loved their money.

Be not anxious about your life

- **Because of this I say to you, be not anxious about your life, what ye may eat, or what ye may drink, nor yet for your body, what ye may wear. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the clothing? Look to the birds of the sky, because they sow not, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns, and**

your heavenly Father feeds them. Are ye not more valuable than they? And which man of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span?

- **And why are ye anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, nor do they spin, yet I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. And if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into an oven, will he not much more you, O ye of little faith?**
- **Be not therefore anxious, saying, What may we eat? or, What may we drink? or, What may we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that ye need all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**
- **Be not therefore anxious for the morrow, for the morrow will be anxious about things of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil of it** (Matthew 6:25-34).

Anxiety is a kind of fear or foreboding about the future. Some kinds of fear are healthy, such as our fear of lightning and our fear of God. However, anxiety is fear that involves a paralyzing dread. And that is not what our Lord wants of us. He wants us to trust him. Therefore he spoke those very encouraging words, telling us that God will provide all our needs. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and trust that God will provide for our needs.

Of course, we must labor for our food and shelter. But if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will provide for those things. Seeking his kingdom and his righteousness gives us great assurance so that we need not be anxious for our needs.

The words of Jesus were especially appreciated during those ancient times when the people were much poorer. In modern America there is no person who cannot obtain food and shelter if they genuinely want it. We have a welfare government that guarantees those things. The great majority of the “homeless” in America prefer living like hobos. And those who are not, are only homeless for a short time.

Notice how Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the sky and clothes the lilies of the field. God is actively involved with his world, continually maintaining everything in it and observing everything that happens. I explain how he does those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus ended those encouraging words about the needs of our body by saying, **“Sufficient for the day is the evil of it.”** That means each day is going to have some evils in it, and they are enough for us to deal with. It is foolish to fret about what kind of evils we might face in the future. Of course, we must be prudent and prepare for possible troubles and difficulties, but not fret about what they might be. I heard a wise saying about that: The troubles we think we might have in the future are almost always worse than the actual troubles that happen to us.

Criticizing

- **Do not criticize, that ye may not be criticized. For by what criticism ye criticize, ye will be criticized, and by what measure ye measure, it will be measured to you (Matthew 7:1-2).**

What did Jesus mean by not criticizing? He certainly did not mean that we should never judge. Because the apostle John records a time when Jesus explained how healing on the sabbath was not wrong, and then he added, **“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”** (John 7:24).

What Jesus meant about not criticizing probably refers to faultfinding and being too critical. For Jesus himself criticized men like the religious leaders of the Jews. For example, Matthew records a time he called them blind leaders: **“Then having come near, his disciples said to him, Know thou that the Pharisees were offended when they heard the saying? But having answered, he said, Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant, will be uprooted. Leave them. They are blind leaders of blind men, and if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch”** (Matthew 15:12-14).

The statement about what we measure, is rich with meaning, and can be broadly generalized. Applied to what he said about criticism, it means the more critical we are of others the more we will be criticized. Thus we should not criticize others more than we would want to be criticized ourselves. The principle about measuring also applies to other things like generosity and friendliness. The more generous and the more friendly we are, the more others will be generous and friendly to us.

Seeing the faults of others

- **And why do thou see the speck in thy brother’s eye, but do not notice the beam in thine own eye? Or how will thou say to thy brother, Let me take out the speck from thine eye, and behold, the beam in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first take out the beam from thine own eye, and then thou will see clearly to take out the speck from thy brother’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5).**

Those words give a good example of faultfinding. They are, of course, figurative words, and should be applied in a relative sense. Regarding the beam in our own eye, since everyone of us knows more about our own faults and failures than anyone else, then in a relative sense, we know about the beam in our own eye, even though we may see the speck in our brother’s eye. If we really want to help our brother remove the few of his faults that we can see, we should first remove the many of our own faults that only we can see, especially those of our thoughts.

I think it is significant that the most guilty creature in existence is also the most accusative; namely, the devil, which very word means false accuser. And that characteristic of him is very common among his most active disciples. For they are quick to criticize the righteous with many false accusations, while they themselves are full of guilt.

Do not give to the unworthy

- **Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turned back may lacerate you** (Matthew 7:6).

Jesus earlier said we should give to those who ask us. Here he is giving an example of how we must be judicious in applying his commands. Using those figurative words, he is saying that we should *not* give anything pure and valuable to unworthy men. He even compared unworthy men to dogs and swine, which were among the most repulsive animals to the Jews. For a Jew to be called either one was a grievous insult.

Nevertheless, there are men that deserve being called dogs and swine, because there have always been wretched unworthy men. Job even spoke of them. For when he was lamenting about his suffering and oppression, among the things he said was, “... **now those who are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I disdained to set with the dogs of my flock**” (Job 30:1). Even the vilest of men held Job in derision during his time of great suffering.

Notice how Jesus warned that such wretched men would not only ruin your gifts, but they would endanger you. I have read of numerous cases where well-meaning souls tried to help unworthy men and were abused by them, sometimes even to the point of death. That is especially true in America because we are such a generous people. A modern proverb says, “You can take the man out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the man.” That also applies to what Jesus said above. You can take a man out of the sewer, but you cannot take the sewer out of the man. Only a man can change himself to be worthy of assistance. And even then such men should be tested for authenticity, because evil men can be diabolically deceitful.

Making our requests to God

- **Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and ye will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For every man who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son may ask for bread, will give him a stone, and if he may ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye therefore, being evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him?** (Matthew 7:7-11).

What Jesus meant by asking, seeking, and knocking was to earnestly strive to obtain good things; whether they be for things spiritual or material. And those who earnestly strive to obtain are those who do obtain. They obtain eventually—if they persevere. And that was what Jesus was teaching. Of course, God expects us to ask, seek, and knock with the methods of righteousness, and not sinfully.

Consider the example of seeking wisdom. For James said, “**And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not**

think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8).

Remember, however, all wisdom comes with time and labor. Think not that God will give anything to you miraculously. We must work together with him. And as we struggle and strive for what we want he will bless us.

Notice above how Jesus emphasized that God knows how to give good gifts to us. And like a father to his children, he wants to give good things to us. Also notice how James spoke about how God gives generously. Nevertheless, there are some things people ask and seek that God will not provide. Like a father with his children, God knows best what we should have, and what is best for us.

The Golden rule

- **All things therefore, as many as ye may want that men should do to you, so also do ye to them, for this is the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12).**

That commandment is what we now call the golden rule. And notice how Jesus said that rule was the summation of the teachings of the Old Testament, because the law and the prophets refer to the Old Testament. From the very beginning of the creation God has wanted us to treat our fellow man the way we want to be treated. The heart of that command is a principle about the kind of attitude and behavior we should have toward other men. It is an example of the command that we should love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matthew 19:19).

Of course, as with most of Jesus’ commands, the one we call the golden rule should be applied with wisdom and prudence, and not literally and legalistically.

The wide and the narrow ways of life

- **Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it (Matthew 7:13-14).**

Those words are both a statement of fact and a warning. They tell us that most of mankind is living in ways that lead to eternal destruction. And the history of the world certainly confirms that as a fact. Men of the world prefer the ways of sin over the ways of righteousness. Therefore, do not be too frustrated when you see so much sin, injustice, and wickedness. It is the nature of a world in rebellion against God and his righteousness.

Instead, rejoice greatly if you are one of the few who have chosen the ways of righteousness that lead to life. That means you are one of a very select group that has chosen God and seek to become one of his sons for eternity in heaven. Nevertheless remember, Jesus also taught that we few are going to be hated by the majority, and will suffer persecution from them because we do not belong to them and because we condemn the evil ways they are living.

Wolves in sheep's clothing

- **But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves** (Matthew 7:15-20).

A prophet is simply a man who speaks for God, typically by communicating a message from him. Since there have always been false prophets God gave his true prophets the power to predict some future events and/or to perform some miraculous sign to prove their genuineness.

That was especially needed because, as Jesus warned in the above passage, false prophet disguise themselves as righteous. And that makes them even more dangerous, because they are in fact predatory wolves. They are like the devil himself, whom Peter warned about when he said, **"Be sober, be vigilant. Your opponent the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom to devour. Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing the same sufferings are to be accomplished in the world by your brotherhood"** (First Peter 5:8-9).

God no longer gives men the power to predict future events with absolute certainty or to perform any kind of miraculous sign. Those powers ceased after the New Testament was written. They ceased because God now speaks to us through his words in the holy Bible. For the author of the book of Hebrews said, **"God, who formerly spoke in many portions and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets, spoke to us in these last days by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the ages"** (Hebrews 1:1-2). In these last days God spoke to us by his Son Jesus Christ, whose words are now recorded in the record of the New Testament.

There will always be men who are spokesmen for God in the sense of proclaiming the word of God from the Bible. And in a strictly literal sense of the definition such men are prophets. Nevertheless, every man who claims to be a prophet as they were in Bible times is a false prophet. Hence, false prophets now include not only men who claim to be divinely inspired, but also who proclaim the word of God falsely.

Paul spoke of such men when he warned about those who claimed to be apostles. He said to his brothers in Corinth, **"But what I do, I also will do, so that I may cut off the opportunity of those who desire an opportunity, that in what they boast, they might appear just as we also. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ."**

"And no marvel, for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his helpers also disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (Second Corinthians 11:12-15). All men now who claim apostolic succession are the same kind of false apostles that Paul condemned, because the word of God says nothing about apostolic succession.

Jesus warned about false prophets who make themselves appear pious, but who prey upon the weak and ignorant. The scholars and the Pharisees were such men. They claimed to be spokesmen for God, but inside they were wicked and corrupt.

Jesus uttered a curse against them when he said, **"Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way**

also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:27-28).

Nevertheless, there are many other men like them. Indeed, this world is filled with treacherous creatures including some humans. Such creatures love to disguise themselves to make it easier for them to prey upon others. Jesus used the example of men who were like predatory wolves coming to us stealthily in sheep’s clothing.

A modern example is those who are called “confidence men.” They are called that because they strive to obtain confidence from their victims in order to prey upon them. Confidence men are typically criminals, but there are many other men who do the same kinds of things, but manage to remain legal.

Therefore, beware of any man who claims to be a prophet divinely inspired as they were during Bible times. Such men are always without exception false prophets. Indeed, any man who claims to be a prophet of any kind should be rejected, because people now associate the word prophet with men who are divinely inspired. Therefore, a man applying that word to himself is in fact being deceitful, even if not by the strictly literal definition of the word: a spokesman for God.

Good and bad fruits

- **From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. So then from their fruits ye will know them (Matthew 7:15-20).**

In that passage, as part of his warning about false prophets, Jesus compared the character of men to different kinds of trees. The best way to determine good trees from bad ones is by the kind of fruits they produce. Jesus said that good fruits, such as grapes and figs, are not grown from corrupt trees (corrupt in the sense of producing harmful fruit), nor are bad things, such as thorns and thistles produced by good trees. His lesson is that the way to detect false spokesmen for God was to observe their fruits—their manner of living and the consequences of what they say and do.

Remember however, such deceivers are often able to conceal their evil for a time before they expose themselves. Therefore, we need to be very cautious, and test their authenticity. And that is true of whomever we must deal with.

Indeed, testing people is commanded, because the apostle John said to us, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but examine the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (First John 4:1). It is our duty to examine the spirits, the spirits of men. And any man who resents being examined has things he wants to hide, and he must be treated with great caution and suspicion. And our greatest standard by which to examine men is the word of God, the holy Bible.

When Jesus said every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, he was speaking about the lake of fire called hell. That will be the ultimate punishment of every man who does not produce good works while he lives in this life. Men will be cast

into hell not because they have no faith in God, but because they do not produce good fruits. Nevertheless, that does not mean we can earn our way into heaven. It is still a gift of God, because none of us have the power to earn it. Only Jesus Christ the Son of God was able because he always obeyed the Father and never condemned himself by sinning.

Honoring the Lord with only words

- **Not every man who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of my Father in the heavens.**
- **Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then I will profess to them, I never acknowledged you. Depart from me, ye who work lawlessness (Matthew 7:21-23).**

In that passage Jesus is warning that it takes much more than simply believing him and doing some good works to be recognized by him. The Pharisees and the scholars were zealous about honoring God, and they no doubt did some good works. However, they were hypocrites whom Jesus condemned. He called them whitewashed tombs because they appeared righteous before men, but inside were full of dead men's bones and all manner of uncleanness. Jesus said such hypocrites were workers of lawlessness. Such men may commit no crimes, but they sin against God and his righteousness. They are lawless regarding the righteousness of God.

I have seen and continue to see many examples of such men. I am especially aware of those who claim allegiance to Christ, because I have learned enough about the word of God to see how much they disobey him. Indeed, most of the popular leaders among those who believe in Christ work lawlessness against him because they disobey his commands.

For example, the leaders of the Catholic church make no effort to obey most of the commands given by Christ and his apostles as recorded in the New Testament. Consider how similar they are to this description of the Pharisees that Jesus gave: **"But all their works they do in order to be seen by men. And they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the hems of their garments. And they love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be designated by men, Rabbi, Rabbi.**

"But be ye not designated Rabbi, for one is your leader, the Christ, and ye are all brothers. And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your father, he in the heavens. And be ye not designated leaders, for one is your leader, the Christ" (Matthew 23:5-10).

And the great majority of the leaders of the protestant churches (as well as those of the Catholics) teach against obeying the very command required for us to become a Christian. For Jesus said, **"He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned"** (Mark 16:16). And Peter said, **"... in the days of Noah who prepared an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water. Which counterpart—immersion—now also saves us, not the putting away of filth of flesh, but an appeal of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..."** (First Peter 3:21). No man can receive salvation without being immersed in

water for the remission of his sins. Yet the great majority of the leaders of those who say they believe in Christ teach against it.

Building on a solid foundation

- **Therefore every man, whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will compare him to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it had been founded upon the rock.**
- **And every man who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be compared to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell. And great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24-27).**

The foundation of a building is what supports it. A foundation of sand has no strength to endure any kind of stress. Therefore, if a building is going to last it must be built upon something solid like rock. Jesus used that lesson to teach us the importance of having a solid foundation for our lives.

The Bible says that the very throne of God is supported by a foundation. And that foundation is righteousness and justice. For the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). That means righteousness and justice support God’s authority over all things. God is not a tyrant who rules arbitrarily by whim. Everything he does is supported by righteousness and justice.

A prophecy by Isaiah told how the Christ would be a sure foundation: **“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation. He who believes in him shall, no, not be shamed”** (Isaiah 28:16). And Paul said about Christ, **“For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”** (First Corinthians 3:11). Paul then spoke more about building upon that foundation.

Having a solid foundation is essential not only for the construction of buildings, but for the development of our lives, especially our spiritual lives. And there is no greater foundation for us than to establish our lives by obedience to the good news of Jesus Christ. Because when trials and tribulations come, every life founded upon the good news of Christ will endure. And for his faithful disciples, on the great day of judgment when every man is tried by Christ, we will stand with him because we chose him to be the foundation of our lives.

Jesus taught with authority

- **And it came to pass, when Jesus finished these sayings, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as having authority, and not as their scholars (Matthew 7:28-29).**

The people were astonished because they had never heard a man teach them with such authority. Jesus seemed to be only a poor itinerant preacher, yet he taught them things beyond what they had been taught before. Indeed, he often contrasted what he taught with

what they had been taught before. For example, in his sermon on the mount, five times he said to the people, **“Ye have heard that it was said But I say to you...”** (see Matthew 5).

The Jews did add many traditions and laws to those of Moses, which they call the “oral law.” However, those additions were all endorsed by the chief priests and elders. They were not added by itinerant preachers like Jesus. Nor were they added by the scholars without first being endorsed by the chief priests and elders.

The oral laws of the Jews are actually sins against God, because Moses said, **“Whatever thing I command you, that shall ye observe to do. Thou shall not add to it, nor diminish from it”** (Deuteronomy 12:32). The only exception Moses gave was the coming of the Christ. For he said to the sons of Israel, **“Jehovah thy God will raise up for thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brothers, like me. Ye shall hearken to him ...”** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The Jews not only disobeyed the command against adding or diminishing the laws of Moses, but they disobeyed the command to hearken to the prophet like Moses that God sent to them. Jesus was like Moses in being a law giver who had the power to perform miracles. And the new law that Jesus brought us is his good news of our salvation, which is a law of liberty not a legal system like the law of Moses.

Cleansing a leper

- **And upon his coming down from the mountain, many multitudes followed him. And behold, a leper who came, worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou can cleanse me. And having reached out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, I will, be thou cleansed. And straightaway his leprosy was cleansed.**
- **And Jesus says to him, See thou speak to no man, but go, show thyself to the priest, and bring the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony to them** (Matthew 8:1-4).

Jesus sometimes refused requests made of him, but he never refused to heal a sick man. The law of Moses required lepers to live apart, and to cry out “Unclean, unclean” whenever people were coming near them (see Leviticus 13:45). In the law of Moses just touching a leper made a man unclean. Nevertheless, Jesus touched the leper when he made him clean. Jesus was the Son of God, who lived without sin. He could not be made unclean that way because he had the power to make those who were unclean become clean.

The command that Jesus gave to the healed man was a requirement of the law of Moses whenever a leprous man was healed. That law is recorded in the book of Leviticus (see Leviticus 14). One of the duties of the priests was to verify if someone or something was unclean. And the priests were also to verify if what had been unclean became clean. The law of Moses emphasized cleanliness, especially with dead flesh and skin diseases. Those ancient peoples knew nothing of germs in those days, but God has always known. Therefore, he gave them such laws to help protect those who obeyed him.

A centurion's great faith

- **And upon his entering into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my boy has been laid down in the house, paralyzed, extremely tormented. And Jesus says to him, after coming I will heal him.**
- **And having answered, the centurion said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my boy will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under myself. And I say to this man, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my bondman, Do this, and he does it.**
- **And when Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith (Matthew 8:5-10).**

When Jesus offered to come and heal the centurion's boy, the centurion explained why he wanted to spare Jesus the trouble of coming. The faith of that centurion was so great that he trusted Jesus could heal wherever he was. And Jesus praised the man for his great faith. It was greater than any that Jesus had seen even among God's people of Israel.

Of course, Jesus knew that he could heal without being with the boy. Nevertheless, he was ready to go to him. He was willing to go because Jesus often accommodated to the weak faith of men. He would go so that their faith in him would increase. There were times when Jesus did heal at a distance, and when he did he told those who made request of him that their sick were healed.

Why Jesus went to some of them to heal, but he remained at a distance to heal others is not told. There were generally two reasons why Jesus healed people. One reason was to provide proof that God had sent him. The second reason was simply to show compassion. Those he healed for that reason were usually the ones he commanded not to broadcast the healing. I say more about that farther in my commentary.

Regarding what the centurion said about his authority, authority is having power over others. Jesus is called the King of kings and the Lord of lords (see Revelation 17:14). He has the ultimate authority over everybody, except of course God the Father. Nevertheless, the world is filled with sinners who ignore his authority, which is why the world is filled with evils.

Obedience to some kind of authority is absolutely necessary for civilization to survive. In the world, when people do not voluntarily obey their authorities, they lose their freedoms and are ruled with force. That is what will happen to sinners when this world is over. They will be in bondage and ruled with a rod of iron (see Revelation 19:15).

People in heaven will be from many places

- **And I say to you, that many will come from east and west, and will sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of the heavens, but**

the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:11-12).

In that passage Jesus referred to two kingdoms: the kingdom of the heavens and the sons of the kingdom. What Jesus meant by the sons of the kingdom were members of the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham. For they had been God's chosen people. Nevertheless, because they rejected the Son of God, he will reject them. They will be cast into the outer darkness, while many Gentiles from around the world will be accepted. Those Gentiles will be accepted because they believed and obeyed our Savior Jesus Christ.

Weeping indicates great sorrow. Gnashing of teeth indicates great anger. Hence, there will be both great sorrow and great anger in hell, which place is in the outer darkness. Souls will weep there not only because of the pain, but also because they will have such great regrets about failing to accept the salvation that Jesus offered. Souls will also gnash their teeth there because they will have great anger that God has cast them into hell. They will be angry because they blame God and not themselves. I should also mention that there will be many souls who believe in Christ, but will still be cast into the outer darkness because they did not obey him. Therefore, take heed how you live. Salvation by faith only is a false doctrine, completely unsupported by the word of God.

As thou have believed

- **And Jesus said to the centurion, Go thou. And as thou have believed, be it done to thee. And his boy was healed in that hour** (Matthew 8:13).

When Jesus said it would be done to the centurion as he had believed, he did not mean the power to heal was dependent upon the centurion's faith. The centurion believed Jesus would heal his boy simply by asking him. And Jesus said it would be done that way. Jesus would heal the boy without even seeing him, which is what the centurion believed. It was done as he had believed.

Incidentally, in the Old Testament the unit of time called the hour is only mentioned in the book of Daniel, which was written in the sixth century BC. That was after the conquest of Judea, and the consequent dispersion of the surviving Jewish people.

Healing Peter's mother-in-law

- **And when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law, having been laid down, and feverish. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she was raised up, and served him** (Matthew 8:14-15).

Nothing is ever said about Peter's marriage, or anything about his wife. Indeed, the Bible says nothing about any of the wives of the apostles. We know not how many were married, nor anything about who the women were. We do know that Paul never married, because he indicated that in some of his letters. Nothing is ever said about Peter's father-in-law either, although his father Jonah is mentioned elsewhere (see John 1:42).

Notice how Peter's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus as soon as she was healed. She was obviously a righteous woman eager to serve others.

A prophecy about Jesus healing

- **And having become evening, they brought to him many being demon possessed. And he cast out the spirits by word, and healed all those faring badly, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, He himself took our infirmities, and bore our diseases (Matthew 8:16-17)**

Jesus was able to cast out the evil spirits simply by commanding them to come out. When Jesus healed those who fared badly, sometimes it was simply by word, sometimes he touched them, and sometimes he gave them special instructions. The prophecy mentioned is from this passage: **“Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows”** (Isaiah 53:4). Sometimes in the New Testament when scriptures are mentioned the exact words are not quoted, but instead the essence of what they say is given. And that is apparently the case of this passage from Isaiah.

The costs of following Jesus

- **Now when Jesus saw many multitudes around him, he commanded to depart to the other side.**
- **And a certain scholar having come, he said to him, Teacher, I will follow thee wherever thou may go. And Jesus says to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky, nests, but the Son of man has nowhere he may lay his head.**
- **And another of his disciples said to him, Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead (Matthew 8:18-22).**

I have never heard a modern preacher discourage souls from following Jesus. They all promote the rewards of following him, but they say little if anything about the costs. But Jesus did not want a large number of disciples that were not fully committed to him and his righteousness. He always sought the most enthusiastic and dedicated. Therefore, he kept reminding them of the high costs of following him. That is one reason why the churches are now so weak. They are filled with half-hearted believers who fail to realize the cost of being a genuine disciple of Christ.

Regarding the disciple who wanted to go and bury his father, what he probably meant was he wanted to wait until his father died before following Jesus. That would explain why Jesus said he should leave the dead to bury their own dead. Jesus was referring to those who are spiritually dead. For when Paul was speaking about widows, he said, **“But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives”** (First Timothy 5:6). Therefore, since the man’s father and his family apparently chose not to become disciples of Jesus, then Jesus could say they were (spiritually) dead.

In that passage Jesus called himself **“the Son of man.”** The word Adam means man. Hence, any son of Adam (any descendant) is a son of man. The expression son of man is used 197 times in the Bible, 109 of which are in the Old Testament. It is used most of all in

the book of Ezekiel: 97 times, all of which were when Jehovah and his agents were addressing the prophet Ezekiel. The record mentions one time an agent of heaven addressed the prophet Daniel that way.

The few other applications in the Old Testament of that expression refer to men in general. For example, the book of Jeremiah uses that expression four times; each one preceded with the word any, resulting in the expression “any son of man.”

The words son of man were also used a few times in the Old Testament when referring to the Son of God. For example, it was used that way in this psalm: **“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou have ordained, what is man that thou remember him? And the son of man that thou succor him? For thou have made him but little lower than agents, and crowned him with glory and honor. Thou make him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou have put all things under his feet”** (Psalm 8:3-6).

The author of the book of Hebrews quoted that passage of the psalm when he was speaking about the Jesus Christ: **“But a certain man has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou remember him? Or a son of man, that thou help him? Thou made him a little something less than the agents. Thou crowned him with glory and honor. Thou subordinated all things under his feet. For in subordinating all things to him, he left nothing not subordinate to him. But now we do not yet see all things subordinated to him”** (Hebrews 2:6-8).

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man 83 times in the New Testament. The few other times the expression is used in the New Testament refer to men, such as “a son of man.” Jesus even used it that way when he was referring to himself: **“For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man”** (John 5:26-27).

By calling himself the Son of man, Jesus emphasized the fact that even though he was the Son of God, he was a man. He became a man like us so that he could save our souls. And now he will always be a son of man, just as he will always be the Son of God. And by becoming our Redeemer he gave us the fabulous opportunity to become a brother to him in heaven as also sons of God.

Calming a storm at sea

- **And upon his entering into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, a great tempest developed in the sea, so as for the boat to be covered by the waves, but he was sleeping. And the disciples having approached, they awoke him, saying, Save us, Lord, we are perishing.**
- **And he says to them, Why are ye cowardly, O ye of little faith? Then after rising, he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there became a great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?** (Matthew 8:23-27).

Jesus never did anything only for his own comfort. I suspect one reason he was able to sleep during that terrifying storm was because he was so exhausted from his labors.

Another reason is because he trusted God would always protect him. Therefore, he calmed the storm for their sakes not his. However, that does not mean we should have no fear of such things nor struggle to overcome their effects. What his disciples apparently lacked was sufficient faith that, with God's help, their efforts would be successful.

I have no doubt those men were strong and courageous, and they must have suffered many storms at sea. However, apparently this storm was so severe that they thought there was no hope. And when pushed to that degree even courageous men can become cowardly. For example, it is not uncommon for seasoned soldiers on a battle field to scatter when they think there is no hope. Only the most courageous men continue to struggle when it means certain death. Therefore, be not too harsh in judging those men. Wait to see how you would respond to such a terrifying challenge.

Seeing Jesus calm that powerful storm proved that he was no ordinary man. Mark says there were other small boats with them (see Mark 4:36). And only those in those small boats had that experience. We know of it by their testimony. And trusting their testimony should prove to us that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was truly the Son of God, because only God has the power to do such things.

Two fierce demoniacs

- **And upon his coming to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two men being demon possessed met him, coming out of the sepulchers, exceedingly fierce, so that no man could pass by that way** (Matthew 8:28).

There is some mystery about that story. It seems to be the same one recorded in the biographies of Jesus by Mark (5:1-20) and Luke (8:26-39). They say the place was in the country of the Gadarenes, and they only mention one demoniac. I explain why Mark and Luke only mention one demoniac in my commentary about Mark's biography of Jesus

Regarding Gadara and the Gergesa, they must refer to the same area. That area and the people of it must have been part of the old tribe of Manasseh, half of which was located east of the Sea of Galilee. Otherwise Jesus would not have gone there. For he told a Canaanite woman who asked him to heal her daughter, **"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"** (Matthew 15:24). And he said to his apostles when he sent them out to preach: **"Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"** (Matthew 10:5-6).

The power of those demons over that man caused him to act like a wild animal. Demons are very mysterious evil spirits. However, we can think of them like germs that invade our bodies and make them ill.

The demons question Jesus

- **And behold, they cried out, saying, What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?** (Matthew 8:29).

Mark reports the demoniac saying, **"What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, do not torment me"** (Mark 5:7). While the

record in Luke says, **“What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I beseech thee, do not torment me”** (Luke 8:28).

The slight different in the wording (besides the “me” and “us” reference to the demon, which I will also explain) is because each one gave only part of the demoniac’s words. They were all correct in what they reported. The differences were simply a matter of what each biographer chose to report. It is very common for people to use different words to report the same thing, even when they are reporting about what someone said.

Men are not inanimate devices that only record the sounds of things. When people report conversations, they usually remember what was said in terms of the message given and not the exact words that were uttered. It all depends upon what the reporter considers important. Let not scoffers lead you astray about such things.

Both Mark and Luke mention Jesus asking for the name of the demon. The demon said he was Legion because they were many. That tells why there is a mixing of the singular and the plural in referring to the unclean spirit, because one demon spoke for them all: **“What is with me and with thee?”** versus **“What is with us and thee?”**

Those demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God, but they wanted nothing to do with him. Demons are rebel spirits, and they want to live the unrestricted and wanton life of sin. Therefore, they reject God and his Son Jesus Christ. The world is filled with men with the same kind of spirit as those demons. They love the wanton life of sin, and have no love for God. Try rebuking the sins of any one of them and you will see how much they hate God and his righteousness.

What did those demons mean by being tormented before the time? They must have heard that the world would end sometime, and that would be when they would be punished. However, they may not have believed it. How many sinners among men actually believe that after they die they will face the judgment of God to be punished? Those demons knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and they were afraid of God. But they had no love for him. They loved living in sin. Therefore, they chose to risk following the devil.

Those demons may have also thought that Jesus was going to deprive them of their freedom to live independently of God. All sinners consider that to be torment. They consider God’s commands against sin to be an unreasonable burden to them. Consider what the psalmist said about them: **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us”** (Psalm 2:1-3).

What sinners call God’s bonds and cords are for us like guardrails. They are given to protect our lives, and enable us to live successfully in his righteousness.

The demons go into swine

- **Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding. And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said to them, Go. And having come out, they went into the herd of swine. And behold, the whole herd of the swine stampeded down the slope into the sea, and perished in the waters** (Matthew 8:30-32).

In the book of Luke the demons entreated Jesus not to command them to go out into the abyss. The abyss seems to be a kind of temporary prison for guilty spirits, because the Bible says that one day the devil will be cast there for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:1-3). Those demons were even willing to live in the bodies of swine rather than go out into the abyss.

Nevertheless, even when Jesus allowed them, they were such wild spirits that they immediately drove the swine to self-destruction. It is to the credit of the two men that were possessed by them that they did not allow those demons to cause them to destroy themselves. Those men apparently had enough self-control to keep that from happening.

Now, it is reasonable to ask why would those demons destroy the swine when they knew it would mean having to go into the abyss? I can only surmise it was because those swine lacked enough power of self-preservation to keep those wild spirits restrained enough to prevent their destruction. Or perhaps the swine became so alarmed by being possessed that they panicked and stampeded wildly, forcing those in front of them into the water while the others blindly followed. The slope may also have had a sharp drop at the edge of the water, making it more difficult to avoid falling into the sea. Whatever was the reason, it is obvious those demons did not want that to happen.

The people from the city ask Jesus to leave

- **And those who tended them fled, and having gone into the city, they told everything, also the things of the men being demon possessed. And behold, the whole city came out to a meeting with Jesus. And having seen him, they besought him that he would depart from their regions (Matthew 8:33-34).**

It is amazing to me that those people besought Jesus to depart from their regions. Of course, they were no doubt filled with fear when they learned he had such power. They were probably also troubled at the death of all those swine, which represented a large financial loss to them. Jesus allowed that loss because those swine were unclean beasts that were dangerous to eat. He knew that, but they did not.

Mankind now knows how dangerous it is to eat such pork unless it is carefully cooked, because when they live in the countryside those animals are full of parasites. And those swine would probably have caused much disease and death from the infection of those who ate them. Jesus actually blessed those people by allowing those swine to be destroyed. There are even now many people in places like Africa who suffer many diseases because of things like unclean water, which they continually drink. They drink it from ignorance and unbelief, not believing it will harm them without disinfecting it.

Jesus' authority to forgive sins

- **And after entering into the boat, he passed over, and came into his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralyzed man who was placed on a bed. And having seen their faith Jesus said to the paralyzed man, Cheer up, child, thy sins have been forgiven thee.**

- **And behold, some of the scholars said within themselves, This man blasphemes. And having known their thoughts Jesus said, Why think ye evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, Thy sins have been forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (then he says to the paralyzed man), After rising, take up thy bed, and go to thy house.**
- **And after rising, he departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, who gave such authority to men (Matthew 9:1-8).**

Jesus gave many signs and wonders to prove that God was with him. And healing that paralyzed man was one of them. For only God has the power to do such things. Unlike popular mythology, the devil has no power to perform anything supernaturally the way Jesus did, nor does anyone else.

It was the power of God that enable Jesus to heal, as he himself said to his apostles: **“Do thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). Jesus always gave the Father credit for what he could do. Therefore, we certainly should always give the Father credit for the good that we can do.

The scholars and Pharisees were so blinded in their hearts, that they never appreciated anything Jesus could do. But the common people did. The multitudes marveled and glorified God for giving such authority to men. Jesus used that authority, not to tyrannize the people or to make himself rich, but to help the sick and afflicted, and to glorify the Father.

Nevertheless, even though the multitudes marveled and glorified God for such things, they still did not have the character of spirit needed to become faithful disciples of Christ. Jesus explained about that character of the multitudes when his disciples asked him why he (only) spoke to them in parables: **“And having answered, he said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him.**

“Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:11-16). The people’s hearts were fat, and their ears heard heavily, and their eyes were shut. And they chose to be that way.

Yet Jesus still had compassion toward them. For a passage farther on says, **“And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among**

the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he felt compassion for them, because they were troubled and dejected, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:35-36).

The Old Testament tells how Jehovah had compassion on his people, but he still destroyed them because of their incurable sinfulness: **“Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.**

“And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or virgin, old man or hoary-headed. He gave them all into his hand” (Second Chronicles 36:14-17).

Jesus even wept over Jerusalem because he knew of their coming destruction. For the passage says, **“And when he [Jesus] came near, having seen the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou knew, even thou, indeed even in this thy day, the things for thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes. Because the days will come upon thee, and thine enemies will build a barricade around thee, and will surround thee, and enclose thee on every side. And they will raze thee and thy children within thee. And they will not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou knew not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).**

Regarding Jesus’ authority to forgive sins, Jesus proved he had that authority by his power to heal the paralyzed man. For he said his power to heal the man was **“that ye may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”** Anybody can say, “Thy sins have been forgiven thee.” But only Jesus had the power to say to a paralyzed man, “Arise and walk” and it would happen. Later Jesus gave that power to his apostles and some others among his disciples before the New Testament was written.

Notice the compassion Jesus had for the paralyzed man. Jesus both healed the body of the man and his spirit. He told him to cheer up, because his sins had been forgiven him. That suggests the man’s paralysis was a result of sins he committed. Many of our afflictions are because of our personal sins. However, many of them are caused by the sins of others. The example of Job proves that our suffering is not always caused by our own sins.

Eating with tax collectors and sinners

- **And passing forth from there, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And he says to him, Follow me. And after rising, he followed him.**
- **And it came to pass while he relaxed in the house, and behold, many tax collectors and sinners having come, they were sitting with Jesus and his disci-**

ples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?

- **But Jesus having heard it, he said to them, Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who fare badly. But after going, learn what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners for repentance (Matthew 9:9-13).**

After following Jesus, Matthew was chosen to become one of his apostles. Regarding taxes, people have never enjoyed having to pay them. However, those tax collectors were especially resented by the Jews because they were serving the Roman occupation of their country. Hence, those tax collectors were considered contemptible men in the eyes of the people, and they were ranked with sinners. They were ranked with sinners because the people considered those taxes illegitimate, being imposed by a foreign power.

Although Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners, he did not fraternize with them. He accepted their invitations so that he would have an opportunity to convert them. He was primarily a physician of the spirit who came to save lives not destroy them. Healing their bodies was to provide evidence in support of his main goal.

After explaining those things to the Pharisees who criticized him, Jesus rebuked them for being ignorant of the passage about God preferring mercy to rituals like animal sacrifices. As Jehovah said through the Old Testament prophet Hosea, **“O Ephraim, what shall I do to thee? O Judah, what shall I do to thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewed them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth. And thy judgments are as the light that goes forth.**

“For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant. There they have dealt treacherously against me” (Hosea 6:4-7).

When Jesus commanded repentance, it was for those who needed it. All men need repentance to some degree. But the righteous need no persuasion; they want to repent when they find themselves guilty, just as the apostle Paul did when he learned that he had been persecuting Christ. Sinners need to be called for repentance. They need to be motivated to repent.

When to fast

- **Then the disciples of John come to him, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said to them, The sons of the wedding hall cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.**
- **And no man puts a patch of new cloth upon an old garment, for the patch of it pulls from the garment, and a tear becomes worse. Neither do they put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine is**

spilled, and the wineskins will perish. But they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved (Matthew 9:14-17).

Jesus was always completely rational in his teaching, and the above description is one example. It is inappropriate to fast during times of celebration. And it is foolish not to match things together properly. One commonly quoted modern example is how one rotten apple will spoil the entire barrel. Another example that is common to modern times would be to keep adding fresh milk to a container with some residue of old milk. The old milk will eventually sour and spoil all of it including the fresh milk. Living wisely means living rationally. And having faith in God and Christ is the most rational thing we can do. Scoffers who claim we believe blindly are themselves blind men.

The next several passages are examples of Jesus healing. They are only a small sample because the apostle John said, **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25). Nevertheless, the record we have of the healings that he did show us what he could do, and how compassionate he was toward the sick and the afflicted.

Jesus goes to heal a ruler's daughter

- **While he spoke these things to them, behold, one ruler who came worshiped him, saying, My daughter has just now perished, but after coming, lay thy hand upon her, and she will live. And having risen, Jesus followed him, also his disciples** (Matthew 9:18-19).

That ruler believed that Jesus could restore the life of his daughter, which took much faith. Nevertheless, he did not have as much faith as the centurion, because he asked Jesus to come and touch her. Remember, the centurion said Jesus could heal without coming and touching. And Jesus praised him for his greater faith.

Healing a woman with an issue of blood

- **And behold, a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, after coming from behind, touched the edge of his garment. For she said within herself, If only I may touch his garment, I will be healed. But having turned around and seen her, Jesus said, Cheer up, daughter, thy faith has healed thee. And the woman was healed from that hour** (Matthew 9:20-22).

Not only did Jesus heal by touching, but those with faith in him could be healed by touching him. Indeed, the book of Luke says, **“And all the multitude sought to touch him, because power came forth from him, and healed them all”** (Luke 6:19). Even touching his garment had the power to heal.

Notice again the compassion that Jesus had for those who were suffering. He told that afflicted woman to cheer up, her faith had healed her. Her faith healed her by causing her to go to Jesus and touch his garment. If she did not have enough faith in Jesus to do that she would not have been healed, because her disease was apparently incurable, at least in those ancient times. The woman would not have been healed if she had done nothing, even

if she believed that Jesus was the Son of God and had the power to heal her. We must work together with God to receive his blessings.

And if our faith is strong enough we can obtain many things that we would not otherwise. Remember however, we must do what we can to obtain them. Remember also, the age of miracles has passed, and we must not expect God will do them for us. Miracles no longer occur because they are no longer needed to prove that Jesus and his apostles were from God. Moreover, whatever we want must always be according to God's will. Which means it must be something that is good and right and just in God's sight. And God knows what is best for us.

Restoring the life of a little girl

- **And Jesus having come into the ruler's house, and having seen the minstrels, and the crowd making a commotion, he says to them, Depart, for the little girl did not die, but sleeps. And they ridiculed him. But when the crowd was put out, having entered in, he took her hand, and the little girl arose. And this report went forth into all that land (Matthew 9:23-26).**

The crowd was making a commotion because the child had perished. My country was founded by English people. And the traditional character of the English people kept them emotionally restrained. Therefore, it is our tradition to grieve and mourn in a more subdued fashion. Other peoples allow the full display of their emotions, and so they make a great commotion when they mourn. In fact some people even hire others to loudly mourn with them during their funeral services. I cannot pass judgment on how people mourn, because the Bible is silent about it. However, the Bible does teach us to always be wise about whatever we do.

The crowd described in that report ridiculed Jesus because they had no faith in him. And the world is filled with unbelievers who ridicule Jesus and his good news of salvation. Nevertheless, the ruler kept his faith, and because of it his daughter was saved. The people ridiculed Jesus before he saved her, but when he did the report of it spread throughout the land. The fruits of righteousness eventually always defeat the unbelievers and the scoffers.

Healing two blind men

- **And when Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying, Be merciful to us, thou son of David. And when he came into the house, the blind men came to him. And Jesus says to them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They say to him, Yes, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith may it happen to you. And their eyes were opened.**
- **And Jesus strictly warned them, saying, See that no man knows it. But having departed, they widely proclaimed him in all that land (Matthew 9:27-31).**

When Jesus was called the son of David that meant they thought he was the Messiah. God had promised David he would have an everlasting dynasty. That was why the people referred to the promised Messiah as the son of David. Also remember, when Jesus said

those blind men would be healed according to their faith, that probably meant if they believed he could heal them they would be healed. However, it could also have meant the man with the stronger faith would have the better vision.

When Jesus asked them if they believed he could do it, I think he was making a lesson. He was indicating to the observers that if they wanted special blessings from him they had to have faith in him. For it was only after those blind men confessed their faith that he touched their eyes and healed them. Remember however, there were other times that Jesus healed without asking if they believed in him. He sometimes healed simply to prove that God was with him, such as with the demoniacs of the Gergesenes.

Notice that after Jesus healed those blind men they went out and disobeyed his command by widely proclaiming what he had done. That is the kind of disobedience and ingratitude that is common in the world, and it is disgusting. Those former blind men only added to Jesus' burdens by encouraging all sick people to gather around him and plead.

If Jesus did nothing but heal people, he could still not heal them all. If God wanted all sick people healed, he could do it in a moment from heaven. Remember, Jesus lived as a man in a body of flesh with all of its limitations. And he became weary from his labors just as we do. Moreover, Jesus was not sent into the world only to heal. His primary mission was to preach his good news of salvation. And continually healing would have prevented that.

Casting out a demon

- **And after they departed, behold, they brought to him a mute man possessed with a demon. And when the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel (Matthew 9:32-34).**

That particular demon caused the possessed man to be mute. Why different demons caused different afflictions is a mystery. Different germs cause different afflictions in us. They afflict us in different ways because of the differences in their nature. And that is apparently true of demons.

The multitudes marveled because they had never so seen in Israel. Apparently no man ever had the power to cast out demons that way. That power was part of the evidence Jesus was from God. A degree of that power was given to his apostles. And they had the authority to give that power to others after the church was established. However, nobody else has had the authority to give that power or to have the power to perform any kind of miracle.

Those powers of the Holy Spirit were given during the time of the early church to prove it was from God. However, now that we have the testimony of the New Testament they are no longer given. They are not given because they are not needed to prove that Christ and his church are from God. The testimony of the New Testament is alone sufficient. That lesson is taught in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

The rich man of the parable was in the torment of Hades, and he asked Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn the rich man's brothers to repent so they would not be cast there. The record then says, **"But Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, No, father Abraham, but if some man would go to them from the dead they will repent. And he said to him, If they do not**

listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead” (Luke 16:29-31). Moses and the prophets refer to the record of the Old Testament, which is the only part of the Bible they had then.

Supernatural powers are no longer needed to persuade people to believe in Christ. Therefore, they are no longer given. The Bible alone is sufficient. What it says is proof enough that Jesus is the Son of God.

Regarding the casting out of demons, apparently some of the Jews had that power to some degree, because Jesus later said to some of his accusers, **“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub [ruler of the demons], by whom do your sons cast them out? Because of this they will be your judges”** (Matthew 12:27). I make some conjectures about demons in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

A cruel accusation by the Pharisees

- **But the Pharisees said, By the ruler of the demons he casts out demons** (Matthew 9:34).

The common people appreciated the good that Jesus was doing, but the Pharisees only saw the devil in him. They were so hard-hearted that their eyes could only see perversely. Rather than rejoice that a man was saved from being afflicted by a demon they condemned Jesus for his act of compassion. Not only did they condemn Jesus for healing that man, but they condemned the afflicted man for being healed. They condemned him by claiming his cure was satanic.

Those evil hypocrites were themselves controlled by the ruler of the demons, but they did not know it. Jesus told of that when his enemies claimed God was their Father. Jesus said to them, **“If God were your Father, ye would love me, for I came forth and have come from God. For, neither have I come for myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye cannot hear my word.**

“Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father. He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it. And I, because I speak the truth, ye do not believe me” (John 8:42-45).

It is very common for many sinners to accuse the righteous of being devils. That is what they said about Jesus, and that is what they say about us. Consequently, when they have the power and authority, they do what they can to persecute and defeat us. However, we should take courage by knowing that Jesus suffered the same way. And God has promised to bless us with eternal life in heaven with Jesus if we persevere and remain faithful in this sinful world, as Jesus did.

Going about preaching and healing

- **And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people** (Matthew 9:35).

Jesus healed every sickness and disease wherever he went. He did that while he was teaching and preaching the good news of the kingdom to prove he was sent from God. Teaching his good news of salvation was his top priority, because that is how our eternal spirits are healed. Healing a man's body of flesh only lasts for a time, because we all eventually perish. Even those he raised from the dead eventually died again. But healing our eternal spirit lasts forever. Therefore, his teaching and his preaching always took precedence.

The need for workmen

- **But when he saw the multitudes, he felt compassion for them, because they were troubled and dejected, as sheep having no shepherd. Then he says to his disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the workmen are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth workmen into his harvest (Matthew 9:36-38).**

Jesus had great compassion for the multitudes. They were the poor and the afflicted of the land. And like sheep without a shepherd they were troubled and dejected. The poor and afflicted of the ancient world were especially weak and vulnerable. We of the modern developed world with our social services have little reason to feel the kind of trouble and dejection they felt.

Jesus also referred to them as crops ripe for harvest. They were ripe for harvest because of their trouble and dejection. Such people are much more receptive to the good news of Christ than the rich and powerful. Indeed, history has proven time and again that people are much more receptive to accepting God and his ways when they are troubled and dejected. Prosperous times virtually always bring spiritual degeneracy. Which is very sad because God would much rather bless us for our obedience than curse us for disobedience.

Pride seems to be the reason why spiritual revivals are more difficult during prosperous times. Nevertheless, whether during good times or bad times, whenever the people are receptive to the good news of Christ, there is a need for more workmen to evangelize them. They are needed because God uses us in the work of saving souls.

Appointing twelve of his disciples

- **And having called in his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out, and to heal every sickness and every disease.**
- **Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, Philip, and Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus who was surnamed Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him (Matthew 10:1-4)**

Here is the list of names of the twelve men Jesus selected to be his apostles:

Simon Peter

Andrew the brother of Peter
 James a son of Zebedee
 John a son of Zebedee
 Philip
 Bartholomew
 Thomas
 Matthew
 James the son of Alphaeus
 Lebbaeus, surnamed Thaddaeus
 Simon the Canaanite
 Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of God, which he used to open its doors (figuratively) when he offered the Jews to become disciples of Christ after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2). James and John were brothers, and together with Peter were considered “pillars” of the church (see Galatians 2:9). Those three were the men Jesus selected to go with him on special occasions.

Thomas is best known for being a skeptic, because of which people now refer to him as doubting Thomas. Matthew wrote a biography of Jesus. He is also called Levi (see Luke 5:27). Andrew and Philip are occasionally mentioned in the new testament. Several men in the new testament are named James. James the son of Alphaeus is probably the James that is mentioned several times in the book of Acts as serving in a special way. Bartholomew, Lebbaeus, and Simon the Canaanite are only mentioned when the apostles are listed. Judas Iscariot is the man who betrayed him.

Jesus appointed those twelve men to be his apostles (the word apostle means sent on a mission). The number twelve is another number in the Bible that symbolizes complete or sufficient. Hence, Jesus chose a sufficient number of men to send out as his representatives, or as Paul called them, his ambassadors: **“And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore, ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were calling through us. We plead on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God”** (Second Corinthians 5:18-20).

Notice how Jesus gave those men authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, as well as the power to heal every sickness and every disease. God had given his Son Jesus Christ that authority and power, and Jesus gave it to his apostles. Of course the authority and power that God gave Jesus was without measure. For when John the immerser was testifying about Jesus, he said: **“For he whom God sent speaks the sayings of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand”** (John 3:34-35).

Other men who preached the kingdom of the heavens were always given a limited amount of that power. Only the apostles could preach with authority, and even then that authority was given only during their lifetimes, when the church was beginning. For no man has any of that special authority and power now. Let no man deceive you.

Sending his apostles out to preach and heal

- **These twelve Jesus sent forth, having ordered them, saying, Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And while going, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens has come near.**
- **Heal those who are feeble, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely ye received, freely give. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for the road, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor staffs, for the workman is worthy of his provision (Matthew 10:5-10).**

After Jesus appointed his twelve apostles he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of the heavens. The above passage tells the instructions he gave them. Jesus did not allow them to preach to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. His good news of salvation was first offered to the sons of Israel, because they were God's people. Only after he ascended into heaven and the church was established were they allowed to preach the kingdom of the heavens to the Gentiles and the Samaritans. The story about that is told in the book of Acts.

Notice this part of his instructions: **"Freely ye received, freely give."** His apostles were not to take any kind of financial recompense for their service to the people. They were only to accept food and lodging: **"... the workman is worthy of his provision."** And those are good instructions for every evangelist. Financial support for evangelists should only come from other Christians or from their own resources. Soliciting money from unbelievers is demeaning to the cause of Christ.

Notice also how Jesus told them to take no extra provisions. However, here is what he said to them later, just before his trial and crucifixion: **"When I sent you without bag and pouch and shoes, did ye lack anything? And they said, Nothing. Then he said to them, But now, he who has a bag, let him take it, and likewise a pouch. And he who has no sword, let him sell his cloak and buy"** (Luke 22:35-36).

I once heard of some missionaries who boasted of taking no extra provisions with them, as the apostles had first done. They must not have noticed those last instructions Jesus gave. It is now foolish to make no preparations for such work, and it may even be seen as challenging God, challenging him to provide for them in the special way he did when the apostles first evangelized. And challenging God is a sin.

The worthy and the unworthy

- **And into whatever city or village ye may enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide until ye go forth. And while entering into the house, salute it. And if indeed the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you (Matthew 10:11-13).**

In whatever city or village they entered, his apostles were to ask who in it was worthy, meaning the house of a righteous soul. And they were to lodge there until they departed that city or village. And that is good advice for all evangelists.

They were also to call for peace to every house they entered. In all of the letters we have from Peter and Paul both of them called for peace to those they wrote. Here is an example from Paul: **“To all who are in Rome beloved of God, to the called, to the sanctified: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 1:7). And here is one from Peter: **“Salute each other by a kiss of love. Peace to you, to all those in Christ Jesus. Truly”** (First Peter 5:14).

Remember however, peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is the absence of any conflict, strife, and quarreling. And alas, that is not very common in the world, because conflict is part of the nature of this evil world. Although some kind of conflict is inevitable, as children of God we should always seek to resolve conflicts for the sake of peace. For it is only with peace that there can be healthy development and prosperity.

The apostles were to call for peace to a house. However, depending upon whether a son of peace was there, their peace would or would not rest upon the man or return to them. Being a son of peace meant being a true man of God. Therefore, only worthy men of God who invited them into their houses would be blessed with peace.

Jesus said for a house that was not worthy, they should let their peace return to them. That no doubt means departing from that house. Their presence in a house brought peace to it because they worked to promote peace. And we should do the same wherever we are. Remember what Jesus said, about peacemakers: **“Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God”** (Matthew 5:9). Nevertheless remember, peace is only possible with the defeat of sin and wickedness.

Those not receiving them

- **And whoever will not receive you, nor hear your words, while departing that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city** (Matthew 10:14-15).

They were not to plead or persevere in places that rejected them, but were simply to shake off the dust from their feet as a sign to such a place they were rejected by God. And that should be our response to those who will not listen when we bring the good news of Christ to them. Jesus only persisted with those who would listen to him, and he continued trying to persuade them as long as they would reason with him. It is when they quit that we are to shake off the dust of our feet, although not necessarily literally.

Jesus then told his disciples how those who reject them would be judged more severely at the end of the world. Hence, what he said is further evidence of degrees of punishment in the afterlife.

Regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, Jehovah had visited with Abraham, and as he was departing, he said to him, **“Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which comes to me. And if not, I will know”** (Genesis 18:20-21).

Jehovah sent two of his heavenly agents to investigate those places. Not long after their arrival the men of Sodom tried to rape them homosexually. Those agents used their super-

natural powers to escape, and then brought Abraham's righteous nephew Lot out of the city with them. After that the record says, **"Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground"** (Genesis 19:24-25).

Sheep and wolves

- **Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Become ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves** (Matthew 10:16).

This world is filled with men having the heart of wolves because they prey upon the weak and vulnerable. We cannot avoid all of such men, because most of them go about in sheep's clothing. Remember, that was what Jesus said about false prophets: **"But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves"** (Matthew 7:15).

The predatory wolves of men are not limited to false prophets. They can be virtually anywhere. Therefore, heed Jesus' advice to not only be gentle as sheep, but to become wise as serpents, and innocent as doves. That is the best way to protect and defend yourself against them. Being wise as serpents means knowing how to protect yourself in this dangerous world. And the only way to become truly wise is to study the word of God.

Not only should we become wise as serpents, but Jesus said we should be innocent as doves. Doves are completely harmless to us. What man is so foolish as to fear doves? And people should be that way toward us as children of God. They should have no reason to fear us. We should always be completely harmless—except toward the wicked.

Beware of men

- **But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye will be brought to governors and even kings because of me, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye should speak, for it will be given you in that hour what ye will speak. For ye are not who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you** (Matthew 10:17-20).

Jesus then warned his apostles of the persecution they would face, which began after his betrayal. Those instructions were rich with valuable information about what they would face in the future, and how they should act. Therefore, they were to be as gentle as sheep and innocent as doves, but also wise as serpents.

They were also not to worry about what they would say during their times of trial. The Spirit of God would guide them. Of course, those men were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit. Although we have no such gifts, we can reduce our anxiety about being brought to trial for our faith by increasing our knowledge of the holy scriptures.

The New Testament was written at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and its words and teachings can be used by us for a very effective defense of our faith. In fact, its words are the best defense we have. Therefore, continue to increase your knowledge of it.

Remember, what Paul said about the word of God: **“... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17). And in that way our memory of the word of God is like the Spirit of our Father speaking in us. And the more we learn of the word of God, the less anxious we will be when our faith is challenged.

All of the apostles were ordinary men (except for Paul later). Yet Jesus said they would be brought before governors and even kings because of him. And the history in the Bible shows how that did happen to them. For example, when Peter and John were brought before the rulers, elders, scholars, and the family of the high priest, the record says, **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they are illiterate and uneducated men, they marveled. And they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13). Peter and John had been mere fishermen. And it was only because of Jesus that they were brought before those renowned men of the Jews.

Expect rejection and persecution

- **And a brother will deliver up a brother to death, and a father a child. And children will rise up against parents, and condemn them to death** (Matthew 10:21).

That warning was not meant to be for his apostles only. Nor does it describe what will happen to each man who proclaims the good news of Christ. It describes the kinds of severe persecutions that may happen to any active disciple of Christ. And the more active we are in promoting the genuine cause of Christ, the more severely we are going to be persecuted.

His apostles were the most active, and they suffered the greatest persecutions. God has ways of balancing the good and the bad we experience. And because his apostles would be gifted with greater powers, they would also experience greater persecution. As Paul said, **“For I think God has exhibited us the apostles least, as men sentenced to die, because we became a spectacle to the world, both to agents and to men. We are foolish for the sake of Christ, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are esteemed, but we are disreputable.”**

“As far as the present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are ill clothed, and are treated roughly, and are homeless. And we toil, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being slandered, we entreat. We became as trash of the world, an offscouring of all things, until now” (First Corinthians 4:9-13).

Thus, the more active we are in promoting the cause of Christ, the more severely we are going to be persecuted. Remember, however, that will only happen when we adhere strictly to his teachings. For many of his commandments are very unpopular and hated, even by those who claim to follow him. For example, the submission of women to men has become bitterly hated and rejected in these sinful times. Another example is the use of corporal punishment. Another more recent example is our condemnation of homosexuality. Anybody who promotes obedience to God’s will about those and many other things is going to be hated and rejected by men. Try doing them and you will see.

Will be hated by all men

- **And ye will be hated by all men because of my name, but he who endures to the end, this man will be saved** (Matthew 10:22).

That passage is a good example of how Greek superlatives are not as absolute in their meaning as our English ones. When Jesus said we would be hated by all men, he did not mean all men in the absolute sense. He meant the great majority of men. Words like all and every as used in the Bible often mean most, instead of completely all or absolutely every.

Another example is the word perfect as used in the Bible. It often does not mean absolutely and completely perfect. That is why I sometimes used the expression “fully perfect” in my translation to indicate absolutely and completely perfect.

Another example is when the Bible says forever. It does not always mean for all times. Often it simply means for a long time, as when Paul was speaking about Onesimus to Philemon: **“For perhaps because of this he departed for an hour, so that thou might receive him back forever, no longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord”** (Philemon 1:15-16).

Nevertheless, although we may not be hated by every soul on earth when we live faithfully to Christ and his commandments, we are going to be hated by the world. Jesus was hated by the world, and they even crucified him. However, Jesus has promised that if we endure to the end we will be saved. Moreover, we will become sons of God for eternity in heaven with him.

Flee persecution

- **But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the other, for truly I say to you, ye will, no, not have completed the cities of Israel, until the Son of man comes** (Matthew 10:23).

Jesus commanded his apostles to flee areas where they are persecuted. He did not mean they were to flee if they received any persecution at all. He meant they were to flee if the population of the area persecuted them. We have several examples of Paul fleeing from cities where the population actively persecuted him, even when he had some support there. The examples of Paul that are recorded in the book of Acts show what Jesus meant by that command.

What Jesus meant by **“until the Son of man comes,”** was that he himself was going to the cities of Israel. Jesus spent his last three years going throughout Israel preaching the kingdom of the heavens. And I have no doubt he preached to all of the cities of Israel. For he said to the Canaanite woman who wanted him to heal her daughter: **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). (Nevertheless, he did heal the girl because of the faith and persistence of her mother.)

Jesus only preached to the Israelites because they were God’s chosen people. Hence, they were the first to be offered Christ’s good news of salvation. It was after his ascension back to heaven that his apostles offered the good news of salvation to the Samaritans and the

Gentiles. God even gave Peter a special vision commanding him to preach to the Gentiles (see Acts 10).

What Jesus said to his apostles about the cities of Israel was that he would eventually preach to all of them before they had. And I believe that is what Jesus meant when he said to his brothers, the other sons of Mary, that his time was not yet fulfilled. They had told him to go to the feast (of tabernacles) and make himself public in Judea. But he said to them, **“Go ye up to this feast. I am not yet going to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled”** (John 7:8). I believe the fulfillment of his time was when he had preached the kingdom of God in all the cities of Israel. After that was done he would allow himself to be arrested and crucified.

Jesus preached to all of the cities of Israel before his apostles did, because when he sent them out they only went for a while to some of the cities. They spent most of their time being with Jesus and learning from him to prepare for after he was gone.

Being like Jesus

- **A pupil is not above his teacher, nor a bondman above his lord. It is enough for the pupil that he becomes like his teacher, and the bondman like his lord. If they have called the house-ruler Beelzebub, how much more those of his household** (Matthew 10:24-25).

If our Lord and Savior was called Beelzebub (meaning the devil), what do you think they will call his followers? If they slandered and persecuted the Son of God, what do you think they will do to his disciples? If they rejected and condemned him, what do you think they will do to us who promote him and his good news of salvation? History has proven that the world persecutes those who are genuinely faithful to him, just as they persecuted him.

Nevertheless, as God raised up Jesus to reign with him in heaven, Jesus will raise us up to reign with him in heaven. That is his promise, as long as we remain faithful to him. Put your trust in him, not in the things of this vain world.

Regarding bond service, I speak much more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Proclaiming truth

- **Fear them not therefore, for there is nothing covered, that will not be revealed, and hid, that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the house-tops** (Matthew 10:26-27).

Everything will be revealed at the great day of judgment. For the book of Revelation says, **“And I saw a great white throne, and him who sits upon it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:11-12).

In that great day we will be judged by everything we did, even the most casual things. For Jesus said, **“But I say to you, that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they will render account about it in the day of judgment”** (Matthew 12:36).

The world loves secrecy because their deeds are evil. As modern America has become more sinful the people have demanded more rights of privacy; they want their sins concealed. Certainly in this evil world there is a need for some privacy, but a sinful generation wants too much privacy. They want their sins concealed. Nevertheless, in the great day of judgment there will be no privacy. Everything we ever did in this life will be revealed and made known.

We are children of the light, not of the darkness. Therefore, Jesus commanded us to proclaim him upon the housetops, meaning of course, as visibly as possible. There is nothing secret about the kingdom of the heavens and the good news of Christ. The world needs to know the truth about what Jesus taught us.

When Jesus spoke about telling them things in the darkness, he was simply referring to the times when he spoke to them in private, away from the demanding multitudes that were not his disciples who constantly followed him.

Who to fear

- **And be not afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** (Matthew 10:28).

Our faith in God and the hope we have through Jesus Christ gives us great courage. With that faith and hope we have no fear of those who can kill our body. Certainly it is normal and healthy to fear death. But for us who believe in Christ we fear the death of our soul much more than the death of our body.

Indeed, the greatest fear everybody should have is of God who is both able to destroy our body, and cast our soul in hell. Remember however, the kind of fear of him that he wants of us who belong to his Son Jesus Christ is not a feeling of terror, but an attitude of great awe, and a recognition of the power he has to punish severely. For he has the power to cast into hell, the lake of fire that burns forever. Only blind fools have no fear of him now, but they will in the afterlife.

God's complete knowledge and control

- **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore, ye are of worth more than many sparrows** (Matthew 10:29-31).

Jesus is here illustrating how God not only controls whatever happens in the world, but he also knows everything about us. Not a sparrow falling to the ground is an example of God's complete control over everything. The hairs of our head all being numbered is an example of God's complete awareness of everything. He does those things through the energy of the seven Spirits of God that shine before his throne. I speak much more about

God's power of complete control and complete awareness in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

If sparrows have value, Jesus said we have much greater value. Therefore, we should have no fear, but trust the care of our heavenly Father. We have so much value to him that Jesus said, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

Professing Jesus before men

- **Therefore every man, whoever will profess in me before men, I also will profess in him before my Father in the heavens. But whoever would deny me before men, I also will deny him before my Father in the heavens** (Matthew 10:32-33).

It grieves my soul that most people deny him, either with their words or with their actions. They deny him with their actions when they disobey him, even if they profess him with their mouths. As the apostle John said, **"And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man. But whoever keeps his word, truly in this man the love of God is fully perfected. By this we know that we are in him"** (First John 2:3-5).

Being professed by Christ before his Father in the heavens means being accepted by him, accepted as a son of God for eternity with him. Being denied by Christ before his Father in the heavens means being rejected by him. And all who are rejected by him will be cast into the lake of fire called hell. Let no man think he will escape the fires of hell if he denies Christ during his life here upon the earth.

Not peace but a sword

- **Think not that I came to spread peace on the earth. I came not to spread peace, but a sword. For I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes, are those of his own household** (Matthew 10:34-36).

I cannot remember ever having heard a sermon about that passage. For this modern generation has created for themselves a mythical christ who is an effeminate looking pacifist. It is that mythical Christ they want to hear about and believe in. Nevertheless, the above passage demolishes such myths about him.

It is true that Jesus has been called the Prince of Peace, which expression is from this prophecy of Isaiah about the Christ: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace"** (Isaiah 9:6). Notice in the above passage from Matthew, however, that Jesus said he came not to spread peace, but a sword.

How then could he be called the Prince of Peace? The reason is because there can only be true peace when sin and wickedness are defeated. And Jesus came to defeat sin, as the

apostle John said: **“He who is doing sin is of the devil, because the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was made known for this, so that he might destroy the works of the devil”** (First John 3:8).

And the reason why even close kin will be divided is because they are divided in their commitment to either sin or to righteousness. Therefore, some of our foes will be those of our own household. Some of them will be our foes because they prefer the ways of sin and darkness instead of the ways of truth and righteousness.

Being worthy of him

- **He who loves father or mother above me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter above me is not worthy of me** (Matthew 10:37).

Jesus again tells his followers how hard it is to be one of his disciples. We must love him above everyone else. And those who do not, are not worthy of him. Loving him above even our closest loved ones is right and good and just, because he and the Father created all of us, and by their power they sustain us. They should be loved above everything and everyone else, because they deserve our highest love. They are the most worthy of it.

Our fathers and mothers merely joined their seed together to begin our lives, and they take care of us until we mature. However, it is the power of God that makes us live and grow, and he blesses us and takes care of us all of our lives (although unseen). Moreover, through his Son Jesus Christ, God has given us the great hope of becoming his sons for eternity in heaven with him after this life is over.

Therefore, it is only good and right and just that we should love God and his Son Jesus Christ above everything else. Consequently, he who loves anyone else above Jesus is not worthy of him. He is treating him unjustly.

Taking up our cross

- **And he who does not take his cross and follow behind me, is not worthy of me** (Matthew 10:38).

Jesus again tells his followers how hard it is to be one of his disciples. His words about taking our cross and losing our lives symbolize the sacrifices we are expected to make. None of which can compare with the sacrifices Jesus himself made for us. For without his extreme self-sacrifice we would have had no hope of eternal salvation in heaven.

Taking up our cross is figurative for accepting the necessary trials and tribulations of living righteously. It refers to every burden we must bear in order to remain a faithful disciple. And those who are unwilling to take up their cross and follow behind him are not worthy of him. For the suffering he endured to save our souls was much greater than anything we will ever have to endure.

Following behind him means obeying his commandments, all of them. That means all of the commandments he himself taught while he was here, as well as all of his commandments that were later taught through his apostles.

Finding and losing life

- **He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it** (Matthew 10:39).

What Jesus meant by losing your life if you find it, is that you will lose your eternal soul if you become a part of the sinfulness of this world. I remember hearing a famous movie actor say that to succeed in the movies a person had to be willing to compromise his every value. And that seems to be a common rule for most things of the world. Remember what Jesus said about the rich: **“Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of the heavens difficultly”** (Matthew 19:23).

What Jesus meant in that passage about losing our life because of him is that we must sacrifice our selfishness completely. We must give up everything that keeps us from being a faithful Christian, whether they be sinful habits, career activities, friends and associates, or anything that requires compromising our relationship with Christ.

Rewards for receiving those who belong to him

- **He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever may give to drink one of these little ones merely a cold cup in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you he will, no, not lose his reward** (Matthew 10:40-42).

Whoever receives Christ receives God, because God sent him. And whoever receives God's prophets and righteous men because of who they are will be given a comparable reward with them. The reason a comparable reward will be given is because genuine prophets and righteous men are hated and persecuted, and it is very unpopular to aid and support them.

A prophet is simply a man who speaks for God. Therefore, the above passage about prophets applies to any man who proclaims the word of God. Remember however, there are no longer men whose words are divinely inspired. Hence, there are no longer prophets as they were during Bible times.

When the above passage speaks of receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet, it now means receiving any man who proclaims the genuine word of God because he is proclaiming it. And such men are hated by the world, because those men condemn its sinfulness. Modern Americans condemn such men as “extremists” who are “guilty” of what they call “hate speech.” Hence, whoever receives such a man because of what he is doing will receive from God a comparable reward with him.

Moreover, Jesus said that whoever gave any kindness or help to even the least of his disciples because he is a disciple would not lose his reward. In other words, any kindness or help given to any of those who belong to Christ, because they belong to Christ, will be assured of a reward. And God has a myriad of ways to reward us in this life. Ways that we rarely even recognize.

Preaching in their cities

- **And it came to pass when Jesus finished directing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities** (Matthew 11:1).

Remember what Jesus said to his disciples about the cities of Israel: “... **truly I say to you, ye will, no, not have completed the cities of Israel, until the Son of man comes**” (Matthew 10:23). Jesus came and preached in all of the cities of Israel before his disciples had completed their preaching to them. God sent him to preach the kingdom of the heavens with its good news of salvation to the sons of Israel, and that was what Jesus did. And he did it in all their cities even before his disciples had proclaimed the kingdom of the heavens there.

John the immerser inquires of Jesus

- **Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, having sent two of his disciples, he said to him, Are thou he who comes, or do we look for another man?** (Matthew 11:2-3).

John the immerser had earlier testified to the multitude that Jesus was the Son of God. The biography of Jesus by the apostle John gives the record of that testimony: “**On the morrow John sees Jesus coming to him, and he says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he about whom I said, After me comes a man who has become before me, because he was before me. And I had not known him, but that he would be made known to Israel. Because of this I came immersing in water.**

“**And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou wilt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God**” (John 1:29-34).

Why then would John send two of his disciples to ask Jesus about it? I think the answer is in the question he asked: “... **do we look for another man?**” Notice how John did not ask, “... do I look ...?” but “... do we look ...?” In other words, John was asking for the benefit of his disciples.

The Jews were expecting the Christ to be a great warrior-king, but Jesus was nothing like that. And so John’s disciples were apparently expressing doubt about Jesus being the Christ. Therefore, John sent two of them to ask Jesus directly. John knew that as the Son of God, Jesus would speak the truth about himself.

Notice also how John sent two of his disciples. Since men are imperfect creatures, it is always better to send more than one on an important mission. For example, when Jesus sent his apostles out to proclaim the kingdom of God, he sent them in pairs: “**And he summons the twelve, and began to send them forth in pairs**” (Mark 6:7).

Jesus gave them proof

- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, After going, report to John the things that ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor are proclaimed good news (Matthew 11:4-5).**

Jesus did not answer the question about him being the Christ with words; that is too easy. He showed the messengers of John what he was doing. Then he told them to report to John what they heard and saw, that he was the Savior of Israel. His mighty works proved that he was the Christ.

By performing many acts of miraculous healing, Jesus was showing how he was bringing earthly salvation to them. And by proclaiming his message of good news to the humble and lowly, he was showing how he was bringing spiritual salvation to them. And when the disciples of John reported those things to him, John no doubt explained to them how that was proof Jesus was the Son of God.

Those things were proof to the disciples of John that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Savior of Israel. Those things showed John's disciples that the Christ was not an earthly warrior-king, but a spiritual warrior-king, combating sin, and bringing the kingdom of the heavens for us.

And if we believe the testimony of the New Testament, then we will know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. For no other man could have done all that he did, nor will any man ever be able after him.

Stumbling because of Jesus

- **And blessed is he, whoever will not be caused to stumble by me (Matthew 11:6).**

I always marvel that anyone could be caused to stumble by Jesus, which means being offended by him (See Luke 7:23). Yet I continually see and hear of many who are offended by him. Indeed, there is a growing number who openly express their hatred and contempt of him. However, Jesus knew that would happen, because he said, **“The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil”** (John 7:7). They hate him because he condemns their sinfulness, and sinners hate being rebuked. Sinners are caused to stumble by him because of who he is and what he stands for.

Moreover, even believers in this most permissive generation revolt against many of his teachings. For example, they refuse to accept what he taught about punishment. They cling to the idea that God always loves everybody, and would not send anyone to the eternal punishment of hell. They claim that God always forgives everything completely, and we are obligated to do the same.

They hate and reject what he taught about the subservience of women to men. They hate his command about being immersed in water for the remission of their sins, and they reject it. They hate what he taught about losing our lives to save them, because they love the world and the things of it. The truth of what he taught about many other things is hated, and they stumble over them.

Jesus speaks about John

- **And while those men departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes about John, What did ye go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what did ye go out to see? A man clothed in delicate clothes? Behold, those wearing delicate things are in king's houses.**
- **But what did ye go out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he about whom it is written, Behold, I send my agent before thy face who will prepare thy way before thee (Matthew 11:7-10).**

John the immerser was not a weak man. He was a very strong and rugged man who lived in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey. Moreover he was the agent of God (an earthly agent and a prophet) who was himself prophesied to come ahead of Christ: **"Behold, I send my agent, and he shall prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he comes, says Jehovah of hosts"** (Malachi 3:1).

God does not choose weak men (easily shaken with the wind) to do his work. Nor does he choose men clothed in delicate clothing—men who live soft sheltered lives. He chooses strong men who are accustomed to hardship and labor. Therefore, God chose a man like John to prepare the people for the coming Christ.

John and belonging to the kingdom

- **Truly I say to you, among men born of women there has not been raised a greater than John the immerser. Yet the smaller in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he (Matthew 11:11).**

Jesus said that no other man was greater than John the immerser. That does not mean he was the greatest man who ever lived. It simply means he was as good as the best of them. Yet even the smaller man in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than John. But how are we greater? We are certainly not greater in faith and righteousness. Nor are we greater in our service to God. We are only greater by virtue of being a member of the kingdom of the heavens. Jesus was simply emphasizing the great blessing of membership in his kingdom.

John was never a member of the kingdom because it was not established until after John was killed and Jesus ascended back to heaven. John never had the opportunity here on the earth. But there is no doubt he is certainly a member in heaven now. And I personally believe he ranks among the first in the position of those who are there. I base that judgment on the life he lived and what Jesus said about him. For no man born of women was greater than he.

Aggressors and the kingdom

- **And from the days of John the immerser until now the kingdom of the heavens is treated aggressively, and aggressors seize it. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John (Matthew 11:12-13).**

The comment of Jesus about the kingdom of the heavens being treated aggressively from the time of John does not mean it was available to men at that time. Farther in this book it tells how Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Matthew 16:19). And Peter did not use those keys to open the gates of the kingdom until the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. The kingdom of the heavens before that time was in its preparatory phase. Jesus said it **“has approached”** (Matthew 3:2), meaning it was coming but not yet there. Indeed, it could not be established until Jesus completed his life of perfect obedience to the Father, and that happened at his death on the cross.

During that preparatory phase Jesus was teaching the doctrines of it, and he was gathering souls to become members of it after it became established. That is why Jesus taught the Jews to obey every part of the law of Moses; the kingdom of the heavens had not yet been established. It was those things of the kingdom in its preparatory period that aggressive men attacked and seized.

Aggressive men treated it aggressively and seized it, not only during its preparatory time, but also during its establishment. That is told in the book of Acts, which gives the history of the early church. And aggressive men have been treating it aggressively and seizing it ever since. It is easy to see how they treat it aggressively, but not as easy to see how they seize it. Such men seize it by becoming the dominant leaders of the people who believe in Christ. They are like the Pharisees were during Jesus' time.

Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus about such men, when he said, **“Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit placed you guardians, to tend the church of the Lord and God, which he purchased by his own blood. For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And from you yourselves men will rise up, speaking distorted things, to draw away the disciples after them”** (Acts 20:28-30).

Of course, not all of our leaders are like that. Nevertheless, the genuine disciples of Christ are still being treated aggressively by aggressive men. Therefore, prepare yourself to experience aggression from aggressive men, if you want to be a faithful disciple of Christ.

In a later passage Jesus compared aggressive men to goats, and gentle men to sheep. For goats are self-willed and aggressive, while sheep are gentle and obedient. And Jesus told how he will separate the two in the day of judgment: **“But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy agents with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from each other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will truly place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left”** (Matthew 25:31-33). Jesus went on to tell how he will reward those on his right hand, but will punish those on the left.

John as the coming Elijah

- **And if ye are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is going to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear** (Matthew 11:14-15).

Jesus also said that John the immerser was Elijah who was going to come. What Jesus meant by John being the Elijah to come, is from this prophecy: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes”** (Malachi 4:5).

John had told the Pharisees he was not Elijah. For the apostle John’s biography of Jesus says, **“And this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent forth priests and Levites from Jerusalem so that they might ask him, Who are thou? And he confessed, and did not deny, and confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What therefore, are thou Elijah? And he says, I am not. Are thou the prophet? And he answered, No.**

“They said therefore to him, Who are thou, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do thou say about thyself? He said, I am the voice of a man crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, just as the prophet Isaiah said. And those who were sent were from the Pharisees” (John 1:19-24).

John the immerser meant he was not literally Elijah the prophet. John came in the spirit of Elijah; not in the original spirit of Elijah himself, but in the same kind of spirit. Which means the life of John was like that of Elijah. And we are to have the same kind of spirit as Christ, because Paul said, **“But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him”** (Romans 8:9).

Why would John be vague with the Pharisees about who he was? Because they were the **“offspring of vipers”** (Matthew 3:7) that he condemned as being unworthy of salvation. Therefore, he answered their question about who he was in a riddle. His answer was true, but they could not understand it because they were unworthy.

Jesus did the same thing to king Herod, who was another man unworthy of salvation. For the record say, **“In the same day some Pharisees came, saying to him, Get thee out and depart from here, because Herod wants to kill thee. And he said to them, Having gone, say to this fox, Behold, I cast out demons and finish cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am fully perfected”** (Luke 13:31-32).

Regarding the ears and hearing, many times Jesus said, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”** In other words, if you have the ability to understand, then use that ability. For we will all be judged by how we use what God has given us. And alway apply these words that Jesus taught us: **“Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and ye will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For every man who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”** (Matthew 7:7-8). If you want to understand the Bible’s riddles, then strive for the answers.

Rejection by that generation

- **But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, calling to their companions, and saying, We piped to you, and ye did not dance, we mourned to you, and ye did not beat the breast.**
- **For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold the man, a**

glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! (Matthew 11:16-19).

Why would Jesus rebuke that generation with those words when the previous passage says the people justified God when he praised John? The people who justified God were those who were immersed by John. However, that generation of Jews as a whole did not accept either John or Jesus; the Jewish population was largely indifferent to them. The multitudes that Jesus attracted were not interested in his teachings, and the Jews still are not.

Jesus compared that generation of Israelites to children sitting in the marketplaces. The children wanted their companions to play with them. They tried being cheerful, but that did not work. They tried being mournful, but that did not work either. Nothing they could do would cause their companions to play with them. Those Jews were like that. Nothing God could do would cause them to reconcile themselves to him.

John, the prophet of God, was condemned for being severely austere in his life. Jesus, the son of God, was condemned for not being austere at all. They even accused John of having a demon, and Jesus of being **“a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”** That evil generation was going to condemn the men sent by God regardless of what they did.

I have often seen examples of how the world judges men that way. And the following principle commonly applies: If they like you, you can do no wrong; if they do not like you, you can do no right. Open your eyes and you will see that satanic principle at work in the affairs of men.

Wisdom's children

- **And wisdom is justified from her children** (Matthew 11:19).

Wisdom being justified from her children means wisdom is confirmed by the consequences of its applications. There are many things claimed to be from wisdom that result in failures. The successful applications of wisdom are what justify its truth. And the failures of false wisdom prove it is false.

Of course, any judgment of success must include the long term effects of the wisdom, as well as its immediate effects. And the consequences of the wisdom of Jesus Christ, both short term and long term have overwhelmingly justified it as true. In contrast, the consequences of the false wisdom of that generation of Jews resulted in their complete destruction forty years after Jesus began his ministry. And the many evil consequences of the false wisdom of the world about spiritual things are proving their wisdom is false.

Rebuking cities that refused him

- **Then he began to upbraid the cities in which most of his mighty works occurred, because they did not repent. Woe to thee, Chorazin! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! Because if the mighty works that occurred in you occurred in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.**

- **And thou, Capernaum, which was exalted as far as the sky. Thou will be brought down as far as Hades, because if the mighty works had occurred in Sodom that occurred in thee, it would have remained until this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matthew 11:20-24).**

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were cities just north of the Sea of Galilee, and they were within a few miles of each other. Hence, what was done in one of them was soon known in the others.

Tyre and Sidon are mentioned many times in the Old Testament. They were both seaport cities on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea that became rich from commerce. They were about thirty miles northwest of the sea of Galilee, and were about twenty miles apart. Although very prosperous those cities became morally corrupt, which turned God against them, as shown in these passages:

Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken it, says the lord Jehovah. And she shall become a spoil to the nations, and her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword. And they shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 26:3-6).

Son of man, set thy face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, Thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Sidon. And I will be glorified in the midst of thee. And they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets. And the wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword upon her on every side. And they shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 28:21-23).

Capernaum was apparently also a very prosperous city, being **“exalted as far as the sky.”** However, all three of those ancient cities of Israel—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—are now in ruins. And the inhabitants of those cities were truly **“brought down as far as Hades,”** which is the abode of the dead. Unrighteous souls reside in Hades until the day of judgment.

Here is part of the story about how God destroyed Sodom: **“And the men [agents from heaven] said to Lot [the only righteous man there], Have thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whomever thou have in the city, bring them out of the place. For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them has been great before Jehovah. And Jehovah has sent us to destroy it. ... Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground” (Genesis 19:12-25).**

What Jesus said about more tolerance for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom clearly teaches there will be degrees of punishment in the day of judgment. Jesus gave an example of different

degrees of punishment when he told a parable about bondmen serving an absentee lord. He said, **“And that bondman who knew his lord’s will, and who did not prepare, nor do according to his will, will be beaten much, but he who did not know, and did things worthy of blows, will be beaten little”** (Luke 12:47-48). How that difference in punishment will happen in the afterlife is never told. We can only conjecture, which is what I do in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The greater severity for those Jewish cities was because mighty works had been done in them, mighty miracles providing proof that Jesus was from God. Yet they would not believe him, even having seen those mighty works, because of the hardness of their hearts. Remember, the devil has even spoken with God in heaven. Yet he remains his enemy. And many of the human disciples of the devil have that same kind of spirit. It is impossible to convert them.

Hidden to some, revealed to others

- **Jesus having responded at that time, said, I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight** (Matthew 11:25-26).

It is not the rich and powerful, nor the wise and intelligent, that are strong in their trust in God. It is the humble and lowly in heart. What Jesus meant by “these things” that were hidden seems to refer to understanding the ways of salvation. God has made the good news of Christ such that only the humble and lowly are able to accept it. A man’s pride keeps his eyes closed to the truth. As Paul said, **“For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe”** (First Corinthians 1:21).

The eyes of proud men see the good news of Christ as foolishness. And in that way salvation is given only to those who are childlike, humble and lowly in spirit. God only wants such to become his sons for eternity. Indeed, that is the kind of heart his only begotten Son Jesus Christ has. Therefore, God hides those things from the wise and intelligent (the great majority of them).

God has given everything to his Son

- **All things were delivered to me by my Father** (Matthew 11:27).

Several times Jesus told how God the Father has given everything to his Son. For example, during the last supper with his apostles, Jesus said to them, **“All things, as many as the Father has are mine”** (John 16:15). When Jesus said all things, he meant everything, all things both in heaven and on earth. Moreover, just before he ascended into heaven, he said to his disciples, **“All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me”** (Matthew 28:18). I also speak more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Knowing the Son and the Father

- **And no man knows the Son, except the Father, nor does any man know the Father, except the Son, and he to whomever the Son wants to reveal him** (Matthew 11:27).

Knowing someone is more than just having seen them. Knowing involves having knowledge about them. And what Jesus may have meant in the above passage by knowing, is knowing in the heavenly sense. For no man except Jesus has that kind of knowledge of God, nor does any man have that kind of knowledge about Jesus in his heavenly nature.

Yet Jesus did say that he could reveal that kind of knowledge about God. And I think what he meant was that Jesus has the power to give us eternal life in heaven with God where we can truly know him as his sons for eternity.

We cannot yet know God in that sense, but we can know some things about him. For Jesus said elsewhere, **“No man has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, being in the bosom of the Father, that man reported him”** (John 1:18). We can know much about the character of God from what Jesus has reported. And that was from both what he taught and how he lived. For knowing Jesus is knowing God the Father, as Jesus said to his apostles **“He who has seen me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9).

Receiving rest from Jesus

- **Come to me, all ye who labor and have been burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is befitting, and my burden is light** (Matthew 11:28-30).

Remember, Jesus extolled God for revealing knowledge of the ways of salvation to the childlike, the meek and lowly. And here Jesus is telling us that he himself is also **“meek and lowly in heart.”** And he calls upon all of us who labor and have been burdened to come to him for rest. He tells us to commit ourselves to his discipleship and learn from him.

One reason Jesus' yoke is befitting and his burden is light is because he gives us freedom and liberty from the burden of legalism with God. Every man not redeemed by Christ is subject to God's laws of morality and righteousness (see Romans 2:14-16), which no man can keep perfectly being sinless. And that condemns us before God.

Moreover, the Israelites were burdened with the great yoke of the law. For when Peter was explaining how the Gentiles were not required to obey the laws of Moses, he said to those who were insisting upon it, **“Now therefore why do ye challenge God, to place a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we believe to be saved, in the same way as those men also”** (Acts 15:10-11).

Jesus also said to those of us who believe in him, **“If ye remain in my word, ye are truly my disciples, and ye will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”** (John 8:31-32). And Paul said, **“Stand firm therefore in the liberty in which Christ freed us,**

and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). Paul said those things to the brothers at Galatia who wanted to begin obeying the laws of Moses.

Another reason Jesus’ yoke is befitting and his burden is light, is because faith in him frees us from worrying and being anxious about our lives. It gives us the peace that surpasses all understanding, as Paul said: **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7).

The yoke of Jesus is befitting because everything he commands of us is for our welfare. Sin is what causes sorrow and destruction. And even if we must suffer unjustly because of the sins of others, we have the great comfort of knowing that God will reward us in heaven when this life is over.

Things allowed on the sabbath

- **At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath, and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears, and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, Behold, thy disciples do what is not permitted to do upon the sabbath.**
- **But he said to them, Have ye not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him, how he entered into the house of God, and ate the loaves of the presentation, which was not permitted for him to eat, nor for those with him, except only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? But I say to you, that a greater than the temple is here** (Matthew 12:1-6).

The weekly sabbath day of rest was unique to the Israelites. And the rest of the world has discovered what a wonderful blessing it is. There seems to be a natural need for every man to rest at least one day a week. Christians are not bound by the sabbath law, because we are under the law of liberty. Therefore, we can adjust our times of working to fit circumstances. Nevertheless, it is still wise to try to have such a time of weekly rest whenever possible, although not necessarily a specific day of the week as the law of Moses required.

By the time of Jesus the Jews had added many more restrictions to what they were allowed to do on the sabbath than Moses ever gave. For example, they created what was called a sabbath day’s journey, which defined specifically how far they could travel on that day. The Jews had completely perverted the original purpose of the sabbath. God gave the sabbath to bless the people not to add more burdens to them. That is why Jesus said, **“The sabbath came into being for sake of man, and not man for sake of the sabbath”** (Mark 2:27).

The Pharisees were especially blinded by a legalistic interpretation of the righteousness of God. However, Jesus exposed the contradiction that such a mentality creates. The Pharisees were so blindly legalistic that there were times when they would rather have the sick and afflicted continue suffering than violate their narrow interpretation of the law. Yet

inwardly they were wretched sinners, being, as Jesus said, **“inside full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness”** (Matthew 23:27).

Here is the law about the loaves of the presentation (also called showbread): **“And thou shall take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes of it. Two tenth parts of an ephah shall be in one cake. And thou shall set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before Jehovah. And thou shall put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire to Jehovah.**

“Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually. It is on the behalf of the sons of Israel, an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons. And they shall eat it in a holy place, for it is most holy to him of the offerings of Jehovah made by fire by a perpetual statute” (Leviticus 24:5-9).

David and those with him ate the loaves of the presentation (which were for the priests) at one time when he was fleeing Saul who wanted to kill him. Here is what the record says about it: **“Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling, and said to him, Why are thou alone, and no man with thee?**

“And David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has commanded me a business, and has said to me, Let no man know anything of the business about which I send thee, and what I have commanded thee, and I have assigned the young men to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thy hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever there is present.

“And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread. If only the young men have kept themselves from women. And David answered the priest, and said to him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days. When I came out the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was but a common journey. How much more then today shall their vessels be holy?

“So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there but the showbread that was taken from before Jehovah to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away” (First Samuel 21:1-6).

David was not forthright with Ahimelech the priest because he no doubt did not want Ahimelech to be accused of aiding him while he was fleeing king Saul. Nevertheless, Saul was such a wicked man that he later killed Ahimelech and all the priests there (85 of them) even though Ahimelech knew nothing about Saul’s accusations against David.

Incidentally, when Ahimelech the priest said he would give David the holy bread, **“If only the young men have kept themselves from women,”** that was because sexual intimacy is a messy process, making both the man and the woman unclean. That uncleanness would have prevented them from being fit to eat of the holy bread.

It was not that sexual intimacy itself is an unholy thing, as the Roman Catholics teach. That perverse idea is why they invented the myth that Mary the mother of Jesus was born of an immaculate conception, meaning she was not corrupted with “original sin” (another false concept) by what they call, that “unholy” process.

Here is the law of Moses about that physical uncleanness: **“And if any man’s seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall bathe all his flesh in water, and be unclean**

until the evening. And every garment, and every skin, on which is the seed of copulation, shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening. The woman also with whom a man shall lie with seed of copulation, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening" (Leviticus 15:16-18).

Regarding what David said to Ahimelech, God never criticized David for not being forthright with Ahimelech or for taking the loaves of the presentation, which were for the priests only. Indeed, Jesus gave that story as an example of how God does not want us to blindly apply his laws in a rigid legalistic way.

Jesus also reminded those Pharisees that the priests continued their duties on the sabbath day. For example, they set forth fresh loaves of the presentation each sabbath, as the above commandment in Leviticus said: **"Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually."** They also made animal sacrifices on the altar during the sabbath day (see Numbers 28:9-10). In other words, they defiled the sabbath by working on that day. And yet they were guiltless before God. Laws should never be applied blindly and rigidly.

The house of God was the temple. And Jesus told those Pharisees that a greater than the temple was there. He was, of course, speaking about himself because he is the only begotten Son of God. And being the Son of God made him Lord of the sabbath, as he says in the next passage. Those Pharisees were completely unjustified in their criticism about Jesus' disciples and the sabbath.

Desiring mercy, not sacrifice

- **But if ye had known what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath** (Matthew 12:7-8).

Jesus quoted that passage from the prophet Hosea about God desiring mercy and not sacrifice to show those Pharisees what the righteousness of God really is: **"O Ephraim, what shall I do to thee? O Judah, what shall I do to thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewed them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth. And thy judgments are as the light that goes forth. For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings"** (Hosea 6:4-6).

God wants us to apply his commandments wisely and righteously. Applying laws blindly and rigidly often defeats justice and righteousness instead of promoting them. The principles of justice and righteousness should always prevail over the legalities of law. Much injustice is done in modern America because its laws are applied so legalistically. They are applied that way because that gives the lawyers more power to manipulate circumstances to defeat justice, such as using legal "loopholes."

Jesus also told them the Son of Man was lord of the sabbath. It was through the Son of God that the law of Moses was given. And Jesus was the Son of God, which made him lord of the sabbath. Indeed, Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament. For Paul said about the sons of Israel on their way to the promised land, **"... they all ate the same spiritual**

food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ” (First Corinthians 10:3-4).

Jesus did not call himself the Son of God to the Jews. He spoke of being the Son of man, which was probably a riddle to them, as shown in this passage about another time: **“The multitude answered him, We have heard from the law that the Christ remains into the age. And how can thou say, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?”** (John 12:34). Jesus did not want to declare himself the Son of God to the multitudes lest they try to make him an earthly king.

The Bible records a time when that actually happened after he fed five thousand men with only five loaves and two fishes: **“When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone”** (John 6:14-15). Publicly declaring Jesus as the Son of God would be done by his apostles after his ascension to heaven.

He went into a synagogue

- **And having departed from there, he went into their synagogue** (Matthew 12:9).

Like the word church, the word synagogue means gathering, assembly, or congregation. The law of Moses said nothing about synagogues. Their worship was to be primarily through animal sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. And about those sacrifices, the law said, **“But to the place which Jehovah your God shall choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there, even to his habitation ye shall seek, and there thou shall come. And there ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock.**

“And there ye shall eat before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand to, ye and your households, in which Jehovah thy God has blessed thee. ... Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou see, but in the place which Jehovah shall choose in one of thy tribes. There thou shall offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shall do all that I command thee” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 13-14).

The place God chose for their animal sacrifices was Jerusalem. However, about five centuries before Christ, because of their continual sins, God sent a foreign army to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and he had the small remnant of the Jews carried away captive to Babylon. Therefore, they could no longer worship him that way. Consequently, the Jews invented the synagogue to keep them united in their devotion to God; that is, the few of them who wanted to be faithful.

However, even after the Jews returned and rebuilt Jerusalem, the temple, and their nation they continued to build and use synagogues. Synagogues were a convenient way for the devout to gather together on the sabbath day to pray and study the scriptures. Like the meaning of the word synagogue, the meaning of the word church now also includes the special buildings where the faithful gather.

It should also be noted that even though the law of Moses said nothing about synagogues, Jesus never said a word against them. Indeed, he often gathered in them with the people. Such additions have never been condemned by God, as long as they do not violate a command, or are not made into another law to make them compulsory for everyone. Additions to God's commandments are always condemned.

Healing on the sabbath

- **And behold, there was a man having a withered hand. And they interrogated him, asking if it is permitted to heal on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.**
- **And he said to them, What man of you will there be, who will have one sheep, and if this falls into a pit on the sabbath, will he not grasp it, and lift it out? How much therefore a man is superior to a sheep. So then it is permitted to do good on the sabbath.**
- **Then he says to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole, as the other (Matthew 12:10-13).**

That is another example of their blind legalistic interpretation of the commands of God. The enemies of Jesus knew how often he healed people. And since they thought healing on the sabbath was illegal, that would give them something to accuse him. Therefore, they interrogated him about it, perhaps trying to provoke him to disobey that law.

However, Jesus proved them wrong by simply asking them about a sheep falling into a pit on the sabbath. Everybody knew they would rescue the sheep. Therefore, Jesus not only proved they were wrong about healing on the sabbath, but that they were hypocrites who cared more for their livestock than they did for the suffering of men.

Nevertheless, they never gave up their rigid legalism no matter how effectively Jesus proved them wrong. Whenever he defeated them, they would just leave enraged and plot how to destroy him.

The most orthodox of the modern Jews are still blindly legalistic about the law of Moses. Actually, the philosophy of legalism is an enduring characteristic of the mentality of Jewishness. Indeed, virtually all Jews proclaim legalism to be the supreme value in every human interaction. Nevertheless, as with the ancient Jews, there is much concealed hypocrisy with them, because their greatest goal is winning, not fairness.

The Pharisees sought to destroy him

- **But when they went out, the Pharisees held a consultation against him, how they might destroy him (Matthew 12:14).**

Unlike the common people, who rejoiced when Jesus performed such miracles of healing, those Pharisees only wanted to destroy him. They wanted to destroy him because he condemned their evil behavior and their hypocrisy. He also embarrassed them in public when he defeated their accusations against him. And that also made them hate him. Jesus always spoke the truth, but they were not interested in truth. Their greatest desire in public was to

make a good impression before the people to maintain their influence over them, and they could not do that with Jesus. Therefore, they sought how to destroy him.

Another prophecy about Jesus

- **And having known it Jesus withdrew from there, and many multitudes followed him, and he healed them all. And he chided them so that they would not make him known, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Behold, my Boy whom I chose, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will declare justice to the Gentiles.**
- **He will not quarrel, nor will he shout, nor will any man hear his voice in the thoroughfares. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoldering flax he will not quench, until he sends forth justice for victory. And in his name Gentiles will hope** (Matthew 12:15-21).

Jesus healed the people, but he commanded many of them not to publicize what he was doing. The reason is because his most important task was to proclaim his good news of our salvation. If he was too heavily burdened with healing people he could not continue doing that. It was impossible for him as a man of flesh to cure every soul that had afflictions. Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to limit such services. That is why he did not want increased multitudes of sick people to overburden him.

Here are the words of that prophecy from the book of Isaiah: **“Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, but he will bring forth justice in truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged till he has set justice in the earth. And in his name Gentiles will hope”** (Isaiah 42:1-4).

(Remember the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek, and you are reading an English translation of them. Therefore, the wording is going to vary a little between the languages.)

That prophecy from Isaiah foretold how the Son of God would go about quietly without fanfare or aggressiveness until he completed his mission. That mission was to defeat sin, and earn the right to save our souls from condemnation. It was the justice of God that gave Jesus the right to be our Redeemer, because he lived a sinless life in this sinful world in perfect obedience to God, even to the point of submitting to a cruel death by crucifixion.

That was what he called the justice for victory. It was victory over Satan the great adversary of God. Satan had no doubt argued that sin is inevitable because he is not like us. Indeed, when Job was wondering why he was suffering so much, he said about God, **“For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, that we should come together in judgment. There is no umpire between us who might lay his hand upon us both”** (Job 9:32-33). Jesus became that umpire for us that Job lamented did not exist.

Not only could Satan say that sin was inevitable, but he had been able to accuse us before God because of our guilt. That way he could excuse his own guilt. However, he can no longer say that sin is inevitable, nor can he accuse us, because Jesus lived without sin, and he earned the right to redeem all who belong to him from our guilt. And that includes the Gentiles as well as God's previously chosen people, the Hebrews. Therefore, we have hope in Christ for salvation to become sons of God for eternity in heaven. For it is only through him that we have that hope.

Accused of being of Beelzebub

- **Then a blind and mute man, being demon possessed, was brought to him. And he healed him, so as for the blind and mute man both to speak and to see. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, Is this not the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons.**
- **And having known their thoughts Jesus said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to ruin, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Because of this they will be your judges (Matthew 12:22-27).**

The text says that all the multitudes were amazed when Jesus healed the blind and mute man by casting out the demon that had possessed him. And because Jesus had the power to create that miracle they began to think he might be the promised Messiah, the son of David. The common people could see the evidence, but the Pharisees were blinded by their hatred of him. They hated him because he exposed their hypocrisy and their evils.

And because the Pharisees hated Jesus, they immediately countered the evidence that he was the Messiah by uttering an evil accusation against him. For in their eyes nothing he did was right. Even doing such a compassionate deed as casting out demons was condemned by them as being from the devil. For Beelzebub is another name for Satan, the ruler of the demons. And the devil, being the chief accuser against the righteous, those disciples of the devil falsely accused Jesus that way. It was a cruel accusation, because it also condemned the afflicted as being cured by the power of the devil.

Nevertheless, as Jesus always did, he exposed the absurdity of their charge. He reminded them how organizations cannot stand when they are divided against themselves. Their charge against Jesus was like accusing the police of being crime bosses because they were able to stop criminals.

Jesus also turned their accusation against them by asking by whom their sons cast out demons. According to their logic, if Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebub, then their sons were doing the same thing. Therefore, their own sons would rebuke them for making such a foolish argument.

Incidentally, notice how this adulterous generation of Americans gives former president Lincoln credit for mentioning how a house divided against itself will not stand, instead of Jesus who originated that saying.

Another example of not given God credit regards a famous painting produced in 1861, which was titled "The Secret of England's greatness." The painting shows Queen Victoria giving the Bible to an African chief who was kneeling before her. One man I read who spoke of that painting claimed what the title meant was that Queen Victoria was the secret of England's greatness. And there are many other examples of how men now try to conceal the Biblical origin of much of the wisdom and many of the benefits we enjoy.

Regarding Queen Victoria, she was a woman of great humility and faith in Christ. As an example to show that, I copied these words about her from <http://www.cai.org/bible-studies/queen-victoria>:

This is a story about Queen Victoria, which without doubt will be known by every Englishman. During the week of her coronation, when Victoria was still a young lady, she was sitting in the Royal Lodge while Handel's "Messiah" was being performed. The lady-in-waiting came to her and said, "Everybody in the room with the exception of the Queen will rise and will remain standing for the duration of the music. It is royal etiquette that the Queen should remain seated." The music continued, sweeter and fuller, it seemed to be sweet enough for heaven. When the "Hallelujah Chorus" began, the people rose and stood with their heads bowed. It was obvious that the Queen was deeply moved. Her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears, her body shook until the melody sounded, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." In spite of the royal etiquette the young Queen rose and remained standing with her head bowed till the music ended. She had never done anything more noble and more royal.

Notice in that passage in Matthew how Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom. The book of Revelation describes Satan's kingdom. I say much more about his kingdom and his war with God in my commentary of Revelation, and in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Casting our demons by the Spirit of God

- **But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come near you** (Matthew 12:28).

Jesus not only exposed the ridiculousness of their accusation against him, but he helped reinforce what the multitudes concluded about him. It was by the Spirit of God (his supernatural power) that Jesus was able to cast out demons. And that meant the kingdom of God had come near them.

When John the immerser began to preach, he said to the people, "**Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached**" (Matthew 3:2). And when Jesus began to preach, he said the same thing to the people: "**Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached**" (Matthew 4:17).

Remember, the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God are the same thing. The kingdom of God on the earth is the church. Jesus came to bring it to us, and the mighty signs and wonders that he performed were proof that he did bring it. They are sufficient

proof for every man who is humble and lowly, is open minded to learn, and loves truth and righteousness.

Plundering goods of a strong man

- **Or how can any man enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house** (Matthew 12:29).

When Jesus gave the example of plundering the goods of a man's house, he was certainly not justifying indiscriminate plunder. Nevertheless, when a nation wants to plunder another one it must first defeat that nation. When a wicked man wants to plunder an innocent man's house, he must first disarm that man.

When righteous men want to plunder a wicked man's house, they must first subdue the wicked man. Plundering a wicked man's house is either (1) an act of recovering what he obtained unjustly, or (2) a form of punishment. Law enforcement officials commonly confiscate goods (plunder) from the houses of criminals.

Either with him or against him

- **He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters** (Matthew 12:30).

That is a very simple but direct statement about being with Jesus or not. There can be no middle ground or neutral observers. We are either with Jesus or we are against him. No man can claim otherwise. The founding fathers of our American government chose to be neutral about Jesus. They refused to commit our government to be with him, which meant it was against him.

Consequently, our government has gradually but increasingly become actively against Jesus. And as faith in Christ has weakened among the population, that opposition to him has become increasingly apparent. Our founding fathers gave some lip service to God, thinking that was enough. It was not, nor will it ever be. For our government now serves the devil. And so it is with every man who is not with Jesus

Blasphemy of the Spirit

- **Because of this I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven men. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in the present age, nor in the one that is coming** (Matthew 12:31-32).

In order to understand what Jesus meant by blasphemy of the Spirit, you need to know that the Holy Spirit of God personifies all that is righteous. For Paul said, **"Therefore I make known to you, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed, and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit"** (First Corinthians 12:3). According to what Paul said, God's Holy Spirit is the ultimate force underlying every act

of righteousness, whatever it may be. (I explain that much more in my comments about that passage in First Corinthians.)

Hence, I believe blasphemy of the Spirit is not a single sin but an enduring attitude of the heart. I believe it refers to an attitude of contempt toward the works of righteousness, which some men clearly have. What prompted Jesus to say those words about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was the contempt the Pharisees had toward his good work of casting out demons. And any man who lives and dies with that attitude of heart will never be forgiven.

I speak in much more detail about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. In the appendix to that book I also explain how every man not guilty of blasphemy against the Spirit may have the opportunity to work his way out of hell by paying every debt he owes against God. Jesus implied that when he spoke of having to pay “the last quadrans” if you are not reconciled with your creditor (see Matthew 5:26). And since we are all indebted to God, then every man not redeemed by his Son Jesus Christ will be required to pay his every debt.

Nevertheless, even though I believe some souls can be finally released from hell that way, they will never become sons of God to live with him and with Christ in the New Jerusalem of heaven. Moreover, every soul with that contemptuous attitude in his heart about righteousness (blasphemy of the Spirit) will never get out, because that sin will never be forgiven.

Trees and their fruit

- **Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by its fruit** (Matthew 12:33).

The above proverb that Jesus spoke is, of course, about men. Therefore, by changing the words “tree” and “fruit” of the proverb to “man” and “what he produces,” the proverb would say, “Either make the man good, and what he produces good, or make the man corrupt, and what he produces corrupt, for the man is known by what he produces.”

What a man produces by his behavior reveals what kind of man he is. Good men are always beneficial to others wherever they may go, being always helpful and productive, and leaving behind a better place. Corrupt men are always destructive wherever they may go, being always a trouble and a burden, and leaving things worse behind them.

What Jesus meant by making the tree and its fruit one way or the other is not clear. Perhaps he was saying that a good man cannot produce corrupt things, and a corrupt man cannot produce good things. For if a man produces good things, that means the man is good. And if a man produces corrupt things, that means he is corrupt. For the man is known by what he produces. Consequently, that is how we can differentiate good men and corrupt men: by what they produce.

The false ideology of humanism has blinded the world in many ways. One of which is to claim the difference between good men and corrupt men is a result of their difference circumstances. And humanism’s solution to curing corrupt men is to change their circumstances.

But remember, wisdom is justified by her children. And the results of humanism’s solution has been failure upon failure. That philosophy has failed in our public schools, and it

has failed in our prisons. Our schools are less orderly and the children are less educated since that philosophy has been applied. And our prisons have become dangerous jungles full of vicious beasts, who are restrained only by the bars and walls that keep them in.

It grieves me to see how humanism is destroying my country. Indeed, it is destroying the entire Western world that had faith in Christ for such a long time. Humanism is a deadly spiritual cancer.

The deeds of good versus evil men

- **Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil things** (Matthew 12:34-35).

Jesus is here continuing to contrast good and evil men. Those he called offspring of vipers were the Pharisees who accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, ruler of demons. Those men could not speak good things because they were evil.

Remember, John the immerser also called them the same thing, as the record says: **“Then Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region of the Jordan went out to him, and they were immersed by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his immersion, he said to them, Ye offspring of vipers, who showed you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance”** (Matthew 3:6-8).

What Jesus said about treasure in that passage is the same lesson he gave earlier about trees and their fruit: **“From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits”** (Matthew 7:16-18).

In Matthew 12 Jesus is speaking about what comes out of a man’s mouth. Hence, the good treasures and the evil treasures refer to the thoughts and ideas men have within them. Good men bring forth good behavior from their good thoughts, and evil men bring forth evil behavior from their evil thoughts.

When an evil man speaks something good he does it to mask his evil intentions. For consider this warning by Solomon: **“Fervent lips and a wicked heart are an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross. He who hates masquerades with his lips, but he lays up deceit within him. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart”** (Proverbs 26:23-25). Beware of such masquerades.

And consider what the apostle Paul said about men who were competing against him: **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his helpers also disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”** (Second Corinthians 11:13-15).

Jesus also referred to the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”** (Matthew 23:27-28).

And Jesus told how hypocritical they were about their words and their deeds: **“The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not”** (Matthew 23:2-3).

Our words and judgment day

- **But I say to you, that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they will render account about it in the day of judgment. For from thy words thou will be justified, and from thy words thou will be condemned** (Matthew 12:36-37).

Jesus said we are going to be judged by every word we speak, which no doubt includes even the secret words of our heart. What Jesus meant by idle words seems to be those we speak casually and carelessly without much thought. We will even be judged by those. Therefore, we should always be careful not only about our deeds but also about our words, both the ones we speak and the ones we think. And that means using a lot of restraint, because excessive words are responsible for many evils. Many of Solomon’s proverbs warn about speaking too much. Here is only one of them: **“Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely”** (Proverbs 10:19).

When Jesus said we would be justified or condemned by our words, he could not have meant we would be judged *only* by our words. For other passages say we will be judged by our works, whatever they may involve. For example, the apostle John said this about the judgment: **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:12).

We will be judged by our works, including our words, even every idle one. And the Pharisees who accused Jesus were guilty of uttering many sinful words. For they often slandered him.

Asking for a sign

- **Then some of the scholars and Pharisees answered, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from thee. But having answered, he said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-creature three days and three nights, so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights** (Matthew 12:38-40).

Jesus was performing many marvelous miracles of healing. Yet those scholars and Pharisees wanted him to create some sign. What they wanted was something exciting and spectacular, perhaps like the fire from God that came down upon the altar that Elijah built (see First Kings 18:38). Jesus had no intention of catering to them that way, because they were an evil and adulterous generation. All of the great works that Jesus was doing before their eyes clearly demonstrated that God had sent him to proclaim the kingdom of the heavens.

The only sign he was going to give them was something far greater than any spectacular sign. He was going to arise from the dead after three days. That was like the experience of Jonah, who was swallowed by the sea creature for three days.

There is much controversy about how Jesus could have been in the sepulcher for three days and three nights if he was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday. Several theories have been proposed, none of which I have seen are satisfactory to me. Below is how I propose it could have happened:

The three days and three nights never meant three entire days and nights, not three 24 hour periods. The three days and nights included partial days and nights. Regarding time, although the Hebrew way of determining days was from 6 PM to 6 PM, the Jewish days were determined from 6 AM to 6 AM.

For example, this passage speaks of a new day ending and beginning around dawn: **“Now late on the sabbath day, being dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb”** (Matthew 28:1). Also, when speaking of the time Jesus was crucified, a passage says, **“Now from the sixth hour darkness developed over all the land until the ninth hour”** (Matthew 27:45). If that were according to Hebrew time, the darkness would have begun at midnight, and lasted until 3 AM, which obviously did not happen. According to Jewish time the darkness began at noon and lasted until 3 PM.

Also remember that Jesus was crucified on Passover, and that particular Passover was probably just before vernal equinox, which is when daytime and nighttime become equal. Hence, on that Passover the nighttimes were probably a little longer than the daytimes. Since daylight began just after the new day in that circumstance, then there would be two times of nighttime for each day: the brief darkness just before dawn, and the regular period of night.

The days would then look like this: a brief time of darkness just after 6 AM followed by daytime and then nighttime until 6 AM of the next day. Therefore, the sixth day of the week made one period of daytime and one period of nighttime that Jesus was in his sepulcher; that day consisted of its afternoon light (daytime) and the darkness of its nighttime until 6 AM of the following day; hence, one day and one night. The second day he was in the sepulcher was the sabbath. And it consisted of the typical one day and one night. The third day he was in the sepulcher consisted of the brief period of nighttime after 6 AM on the first day of the week followed by its morning light when he was resurrected; hence, one night and one day. Therefore, Jesus was in the sepulcher during three periods of nighttime and three periods of daytime (complete on Saturday but partial on Friday and Sunday).

Regarding the arrival of Mary Magdalene to the sepulcher after Jesus' resurrection, John says, **“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene comes early, while it was**

still darkness, to the sepulcher, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher" (John 20:1). Notice how the passage says it was still darkness early on the first day of the week.

Although Mary Magdalene began her journey while it was still darkness, Mark says that she did not arrive to the sepulcher until the sun had risen: **"And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that having come, they might anoint him. And very much early morning on the first day of the week, they come near to the sepulcher when the sun was risen"** (Mark 16:1-2). John did not mention the other women who were with her.

Thus Jesus was in the heart of the earth three periods of the daytime and three periods of the nighttime: **"three days and three nights."** And the way it happened produced the briefest time spent in the sepulcher, while still fulfilling his prophecy. He was probably in the sepulcher for not more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight hours.

Generations judging each other

- **The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here** (Matthew 12:41-42).

Read the brief book of Jonah to see how the men of Nineveh repented at his preaching.

Here is the story of the queen of the south: **"And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of Jehovah, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she conversed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon answered to her all her questions; there was not anything hid from the king which he did not answer.**

"And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the seating of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah, there was no more spirit in her.

"And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came, and my eyes had seen it. And, behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, who hear thy wisdom. Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighted in thee to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because Jehovah loved Israel forever, therefore he made thee king, to do justice and righteousness" (First Kings 10:1-9).

Jesus was indeed greater than Solomon, much greater. Yet that generation did not appreciate his greatness. Therefore, they were going to be condemned by other people who appreciated the prophets and wise men that were much less great. It was truly an evil and

adulterous generation, and they deserved to be destroyed, which happened forty years after Jesus began his ministry. The expression “ends of the earth” is a figure of speech that simply means a far distance.

Only good thoughts can defeat evil ones

- **But when the unclean spirit goes forth out of the man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and finds it not. Then it says, I will return into my house from where I came out. And when it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So it will also be to this evil generation** (Matthew 12:43-45).

When Jesus was teaching lessons he sometimes compared people to things like trees and plants or to animals or even to the soil of the ground. Here he is comparing the thoughts and minds of people to houses. In so doing he also taught us something about unclean spirits, which are also called demons.

Such creatures are very mysterious, but their effects on our minds seem to be like bacteria that can harm our bodies. According to the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia, bacteria are the most numerous of living creatures on the earth: “There are typically 40 million bacterial cells in a gram of soil and a million bacterial cells in a millilitre of fresh water; in all, there are approximately five nonillion (5×10^{30}) bacteria on Earth, forming a biomass that exceeds that of all plants and animals.”

To help you appreciate the enormity of that number, the current size of the human population is about seven billion (7×10^9). There are an average of about 100 trillion (1×10^{14}) bacteria in a human body. The vast majority of bacteria in the world are harmless to us, but some of them can cause diseases when they invade our bodies.

The effect of evil spirits on our minds can be compared to the harmful bacteria that can invade our bodies. And as Jesus taught in the above lesson, the best defense we have against those spirits harming us is to fill our minds with good thoughts, although the Bible record does tell about how some people suffered from them through no fault of their own.

In the above lesson Jesus warned about not keeping your heart full of righteous thoughts. Although evil thoughts may be driven from a man, if he does not fill his heart with righteous thoughts, then evil thoughts will return and be much worse than at the beginning.

Paul spoke some beautiful words to encourage us to think upon good things, when he said, **“Finally brothers, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are commendable, if anything is a virtue, and if anything is praiseworthy, think on these things”** (Philippians 4:8). Of course, thinking about evil things for the purpose of combating and condemning them is not in itself evil thinking. It is good thinking to consider how to combat and condemn evil.

What Jesus may have meant when he applied those things to his generation is that he came to sweep evil from Israel and establish the order of righteousness. And unless that genera-

tion took advantage of what he was doing and promoted the kingdom of God, then the evil and lawlessness in their country would multiply seven fold. And alas, forty years after Jesus began his ministry the Roman army came and destroyed their nation, including Jerusalem and their temple. The people had forsaken the Son of God and his good news.

Being his mother, brother, and sister

- **While he was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers had stood outside, seeking to speak to him. And some man said to him, Behold, thy mother and thy brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to thee.**
- **But having answered, he said to the man who told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And having stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, he said, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in the heavens, he is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12:46-50).**

What righteous soul would not be greatly honored to be a close kin to Jesus? Yet he said that those who do the will of God are his true kin. Actually, we who are faithfully obedient to God are considered his brothers. Therefore, think not that Jesus' mother and his earthly brothers and sisters had any advantage over anyone who obeys God.

Teaching from a boat

- **And on that day, having departed from the house, Jesus was sitting beside the sea. And many multitudes were gathered to him, so as for him (having entered in) to sit in the boat, and all the multitude had stood on the shore (Matthew 13:1-2).**

So many people had spread the word that Jesus could heal them that multitudes came even from afar. The small boat he wanted to be near him was because the crowds tended to throng and press upon him. And if that happened he could get in the small boat near the shore and teach from it. They wanted to touch him because healing power came forth from him (see Luke 6:19).

The parable of the soil

- **And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying, Behold, the man who sows went forth to sow. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them.**
- **But others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much soil, and straightaway they sprang up because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun was risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered.**
- **And others fell in the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.**

- **But others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear** (Matthew 13:3-9).

Jesus spoke many parables to the multitudes, and such stories have two meanings: a physical one and a spiritual one. Parables also have several other values. One value of parables is that they tell lessons of spiritual value in the context of things the people are familiar with. Another value is that parables are easier to remember than lessons expressed in more intellectual language. Another value is that the spiritual meaning is usually concealed to those who are unworthy of it.

In the next passage Jesus explained to his disciples why he wanted the meaning of his parables concealed to the multitudes, followed by an explanation of the parable. Many times Jesus said, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”** In other words, if you have the ability to understand, then use that ability. For you will be judged for it.

Why Jesus spoke in parables

- **And the disciples having come, they said to him, Why do thou speak to them in parables? And having answered, he said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him** (Matthew 13:10-12).

Jesus told his disciples they were given the privilege of knowing the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but the multitude was not. Then he spoke a proverb that expresses a profound truth. It is a general rule that whoever has, more will be given him, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away. There are numerous examples of that truth.

Here are a few: It is common knowledge among money managers that the more money a man has the more he can get, and the less a man has the more quickly it is used up. Every educator knows that it is easy to teach an educated man, but much harder to teach one that is not educated. An industrious man will become even more industrious, while the indolent man becomes progressively more indolent. The man of faith in God continually has his faith strengthened, while the man without faith loses what he may have had. Remember, however, there are always exceptions to every rule. And a few men can rise above such limitations, for God has given us all the power to change and strive to overcome many limitations.

Hearing and seeing but not understanding

- **Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and under-**

stand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them (Matthew 13:13-15).

What Jesus says in the above passage is very difficult for most people to accept. Those words are a quotation from the book Isaiah about the ancient Israelites, the hearts of whom God had closed. God sent Isaiah to the people of Israel, and he told him, **“Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed”** (Isaiah 6:9-10).

God did not want those people to turn and be healed. He had already condemned them. And Jesus did not want the mass of people following him to turn and be healed, because they were unworthy. And later events proved it. For when they grumbled about a hard lesson he taught them, the record says, **“And he said, Because of this I have said to you that no man is able to come to me, if it is not given to him from my Father. From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him”** (John 6:65-66).

God has made the world so that only worthy souls will come to him for salvation. He wants the unworthy to be condemned. Unrepentant sinners are his enemies and the source of all evil. Why should they escape punishment? If a foreign army were attacking your country, would you want them warned about attacks against that enemy army? Only blind fools and traitors would even consider such a thing.

Teaching wicked men how to escape their punishment is something only the disciples of the devil do. God knows whose hearts are worthy of being converted, and they are the ones whose eyes and ears he opens, and whose hearts he softens to understand. Nevertheless remember, only God knows such things. Therefore, we must offer the hope of salvation to whoever will listen to us. And we must pray even for those who persecute us. For they may include men like the righteous man Paul who was a former persecutor.

Being able to know

- **But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men longed to see the things that ye see, and did not see them, and to hear the things that ye hear, and did not hear them** (Matthew 13:16-17).

Those early disciples of Christ who saw him and heard him were indeed blessed. However, we of modern times are even more blessed. We have not seen and heard him in the flesh, but we have the entire Bible record, which they did not have. Therefore, our ability to learn and understand about God and his will for us is unsurpassed. None of those souls who saw and heard Jesus during his time on the earth enjoyed the richness of knowledge that we now have. Books were scarce and expensive, and most of the people were illiterate anyway. I continually marvel at the enormous blessings we enjoy in these modern times. And those blessings include our ability to study the entire word of God for ourselves.

Faithful men will surely rise in the judgment and condemn those who ignored and rejected Christ when he was upon the earth. I also have no doubt that many of those ancient souls

will rise in the judgment and condemn this spiritually corrupt generation of Americans for ignoring the word of God which is now so freely available. Entire Bibles can now be purchased almost anywhere in this country for the cost of a loaf of bread.

Interpreting the parable of the soil

- **Hear ye then the parable of the man who sows. Of every man who hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, evil comes, and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is that which was sown by the wayside.**
- **And that which was sown upon the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and straightaway receiving it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, instead it is temporary. And when tribulation or persecution develops because of the word, straightaway he is caused to stumble.**
- **And that which was sown in the thorns, this is he who hears the word, and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of wealth, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.**
- **But that which was sown upon the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who indeed bears fruit, and is productive, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13:18-23).**

The four different kinds of soil in that parable (that by the wayside, the rocky, the thorny, and the good) symbolize four different kinds of spirits of men. The four different spirits are (1) those who allow the evil in their hearts to immediately dismiss the word of the kingdom, (2) those whose hearts are so weak and shallow that they cannot endure the tribulations and persecutions that go with faith in Christ, (3) those who allow their worldly cares and love of money to keep them from being fruitful disciples, and (4) those whose spirits are strong and righteous so that they understand it and become very productive disciples for the cause of Christ.

Notice how men with the good spirits are the minority. It has always been that way in this world, and it always will be. Remember what Jesus said about the ways of life: **“Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Matthew 7:13-14).

The parable of the wheat and the tares

- **He set forth another parable to them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is compared to a man sowing good seed in his field. But while the men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares in the midst of the wheat, and went away. And when the blade sprouted and produced fruit, then the tares also appeared.**
- **But the bondmen of the house-ruler having come, they said to him, Sir, did thou not sow good seed in thy field? From where then does it have tares?**

And he said to them, A hostile man did this. And the bondmen said to him, Do thou desire therefore, after going, we would gather them up?

- **But he said, No, lest while gathering up the tares, ye uproot the wheat together with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles in order to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn (Matthew 13:24-30).**

Most of those who followed Jesus were not seeking the truth of God. They were experiencing some wondrous acts of healing, hearing some entertaining stories, and enjoying the excitement of being among a crowd. They were like the ancient Israelites to whom Jehovah commanded Ezekiel to prophesy. The Lord said to him, **“And as for thee, son of man, the sons of thy people talk of thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, each one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that comes forth from Jehovah.**

“And they come to thee as the people come, and they sit before thee as my people. And they hear thy words, but do not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their gain. And, lo, thou art to them as a very lovely song of he who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument. For they hear thy words, but they do not do them” (Ezekiel 33:30-32).

Ezekiel was to them as **“a very lovely song of he who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument.”** They listened because he was entertaining to them. And that is why most of the people followed Jesus. For they would abandon him when his teaching became difficult and offensive to them. Remember this occasion: **“From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66).**

Those people were not worthy of salvation. That is why Jesus spoke only parables to them. Their hearts were fat, their ears were heavy, and their eyes were shut lest they would see and hear and understand, and turn and God would heal them.

After giving two more parables (quoted next) Jesus explained the meaning of the one about the wheat and the tares to his disciples because they were worthy. And dear reader, pray to God that you are never offended by what Jesus said, and you are worthy to understand the words of his good news of our salvation.

The kingdom is like a mustard plant

- **He set forth another parable to them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard plant, which having taken, a man sowed in his field. Which indeed is smaller than all seeds, but when it is grown, it is greater than the plants, and becomes a tree, so as for the birds of the sky to come and lodge in the branches of it (Matthew 13:31-32).**

The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of a mustard plant because the kingdom began very small but has grown great. And it has become a haven for all who love God and his righteousness. I recently commented to my wife what a blessing it is for us to belong to a faithful congregation of Christ. For our Christian brothers and sisters are the best people in

the world, best in the high quality of their character and spirit, which is the most important thing about any man.

The kingdom is like leaven

- **He spoke another parable to them. The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which having taken, a woman hid in three measures of meal until it was all leavened (Matthew 13:33).**

Only a very small amount of leaven is needed to make a very great change in a loaf of bread. And that change is for the better, because unleavened bread is always inferior. Indeed, in the Bible unleavened bread is called bread of affliction (see for example Deuteronomy 16:3). Unleavened bread was only used in times of deprivation and hardship, or during times of sacrifice to God.

Jesus said the kingdom of God was like leaven in meal. Mixing leaven in the meal makes the bread much better. And that is what the kingdom of God does to the population of people. Our good influence as faithful disciples of Christ increases the righteousness of the land. And as Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

Rulers like those of communist China who fear the churches of Christ are greatly deceived by the devil. We faithful disciples of Christ are a treasure for their country and not a threat. It is the false churches like the Roman Catholics that are a threat to them, not the genuine churches of Christ. Our righteousness contributes to nations being exalted, not reproached. Moreover, when the general population sees the great value and benefits of our righteousness, it encourages them to be more righteous.

Only parables for the multitudes

- **Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes, and he did not speak to them independent of a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things concealed from the foundation of the world (Matthew 13:34-35).**

Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies about him, and the prophecy above about parables was one of them. That prophecy is from this psalm: **“Give ear, O my people, to my law. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us”** (Psalm 78:1-3). Those dark sayings of old were heard and known about, but they did not understand them, the meanings being concealed from them.

Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, but he explained them to his disciples. In that way he revealed the meaning of things that had been concealed from the beginning of the earth.

One of the major differences between his disciples and the rest of the world is our understanding of what he taught. The world can read about him, and they can learn what he said. However, they are unable to internalize what he taught and integrate it into their thinking.

In that sense they have a mental block, a veil before their eyes. Consider what Paul said about the unbelieving Jews: **“But their minds were hardened, for to this day the same veil remains at the reading of the old testament, not being uncovered, which thing is abolished in Christ. But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:14-16).

Interpreting the parable of the wheat and tares

- **Then having sent the multitudes away, Jesus came into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field. And having answered, he said to them, He who sows the good seed is the Son of man, and the field is the world, and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of evil. And the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are agents.**
- **As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned in fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of man will send forth his agents, and they will gather out of his kingdom all the stumbling-blocks, and those doing lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear** (Matthew 13:36-43).

Jesus uses his disciples (the good seed) to bear much good fruit for righteousness. The devil uses his disciples (the tares) to interfere with that good seed. And virtually every day I see indications of those things happening. Nevertheless, the disciples of Christ continue to bear much good fruit for righteousness, even with that opposition.

And eventually, at the end of the world, the agents of Christ will gather the spirits of the disciples of the devil, and they will be cast into the furnace of fire to suffer their deserved punishment. In contrast, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the heavenly kingdom of God. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for eternity*.

The kingdom is like hidden treasure

- **Again the kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man having found, he hid. And from the joy of it, he goes and sells all, as many things as he has, and buys that field** (Matthew 13:44).

The main lesson of that parable is that the kingdom of the heavens is so valuable that we should be willing to give everything we have to enter into it. And we should also have great joy that we have found it. Our lives here on the earth are so very brief and filled with troubles, while life in the paradise of the kingdom of the heavens is forever. Who would not rejoice exceedingly for the opportunity to become a part of it? That is, if he truly trusted what Jesus said. For those without that faith in him have no desire for it.

An incidental lesson in that parable is that there is nothing wrong with buying a field containing valuable treasures without informing the owner about them. That would seem at first to be unfair to keep the owner ignorant of its value. However, in the sight of God, if a man does not seek and use the treasures he has, he does not deserve them. God expects us to use our energies to develop the treasures of this earth. And part of that energy is to look for them.

Therefore, if a man neglects to search his property, and leaves idle whatever treasures are there, then he deserves losing them to the man who does find them. Thus, we should all use our energies to find what God has given us, and use them productively. Else we will be like the one-talented man in another parable that Jesus told farther in the book of Matthew (see 25:14-30). That man did not use his talent, and so it was taken from him and he was punished.

Nevertheless remember, it may not be possible for a man to search his property for all of its hidden treasures. For example, most of the valuable minerals of the earth are almost always hidden without using expensive equipment. Therefore, it would be unjust to conceal such treasures from a man just because he was unaware of them. Remember, our goal should always be justice and righteousness. Let not the example of that parable cause you to act unjustly.

The kingdom is like a very valuable pearl

- **Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a merchant, seeking fine pearls. Who, having found one very valuable pearl, after departing, sold all, as many things as he had, and bought it (Matthew 13:45-46).**

That is another story with the same lessons as the one of the hidden treasure in the field. Membership in the kingdom of the heavens is a priceless treasure that we should be willing to sacrifice everything we have for it.

The kingdom is like a net

- **Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered from every kind, which, when it was full, after dragging to the shore, having sat down, they gathered the good into vessels, but they cast out the useless.**
- **So it will be at the end of the age. The agents will come forth, and separate the bad from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:47-50).**

The sea symbolizes the world, and the net symbolizes the kingdom of the heavens. The parable teaches that many will be gathered into the kingdom, which is Christ's church. But not all who come into the kingdom will be brought into heaven, because not all will be fit for salvation. Therefore beware, dear reader. Not everyone who becomes a Christian is to be trusted as a worthy person. Consider the example of Ananias and sapphira (see Acts 5).

Let each Christian prove their genuineness by their productivity and the righteous way they live.

Scholars with both the new and the old

- **Jesus says to them, Have ye understood all these things? They say to him, Yes, Lord. And he said to them, Because of this every scholar who has been instructed in the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a house-ruler, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old (Matthew 13:51-52).**

What Jesus no doubt meant by bringing forth out of his treasure things new and old, is that we have both the New Testament and the Old Testament of the Bible. And there are great treasures of truth and wisdom in both of those books. Therefore, every man who studies the entire Bible will have double treasures of knowledge from the word of God. It is foolish for Christians to neglect studying the Old Testament just because the law of Moses is no longer in effect as a legal system.

Prophets are not honored by those who know them

- **And it came to pass, when Jesus finished these parables, he departed from there. And having come into his fatherland he taught them in their synagogue, so as for them to be astonished, and say, From where is this wisdom and powers in this man? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all near us? From where then are all these things in this man?**
- **And they were offended by him. But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor, except in his fatherland, and in his house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58).**

Jesus had returned to where he was raised as a child. And they would not accept him as a prophet because they knew him before his ministry. They knew him when he was a child, and when he became a humble carpenter as a grown man. They could not understand how he could now be a prophet with words of wisdom and salvation. Most of the men God chose to be his prophets were humble common men. The only scholar among his apostles was Paul, and he had to defend his claim of apostleship to many of the disciples.

Remember what Jesus said about the humble and lowly: **“I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25-26).**

Not only would those people of his fatherland not accept him as a prophet, but they were even offended by him. They were offended by the authority from God that he claimed to have, which they could not accept. And their unbelief kept them from being blessed by his mighty works. And so it is with every unbeliever; they miss out on the great blessings of faith in him.

Being impressed with a man's greatness is much more difficult for those who know him best. For even the greatest of men (except for the Son of God) are still imperfect humans with all the frailties of men. Consider these words of wisdom from the Psalms: **"Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie"** (Psalm 62:9).

Considering life in this world only (with no hope afterward), men of low degree live meaningless lives full of struggles and deprivations. They are like the man in the song who said he was tired of living but scared of dying. And men of high degree do not deserve being exalted. Their lofty status is deceitful. For no man deserves being elevated to high degree.

That is one reason why Jesus forbade any of us from lording over each other, which words are recorded later in Matthew: **"Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your bondman"** (Matthew 20:25-27).

It is much easier for a man to be honored and idolized if his frailties and imperfections are concealed. That is one reason why a prophet is not honored in his fatherland and in his house. Although Jesus had no imperfections, they did know him as a child, with all the frailness and weaknesses of a normal child. They also knew him as a humble carpenter. Consequently, the people who knew Jesus then could not reconcile him being a prophet while they remembered him that way.

Herod conjectures about Jesus

- **At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report of Jesus, and he said to his boys, This is John the immerser. He has risen from the dead, and because of this the powers work in him** (Matthew 14:1-2).

Herod could not help hearing about Jesus, because of all the mighty works of healing that Jesus was doing. Therefore, Herod wondered about him. How Herod got that superstitious belief about dead men rising with supernatural powers is not known. For the Bible contains no record of any such thing ever happening. It must be remembered that people create many superstitions about many things, some of which are very strange. And the Jews are no different. You can read about such things in other books (or on the internet) about the Jews, including many written by their own people.

Herod arrested and bound John

- **For Herod having arrested John, bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John said to him, It is not permitted for thee to have her. And though he wanted to kill him, he feared the multitude because they held him as a prophet** (Matthew 14:3-5).

The passage says that Herodias was Philip's wife. However, the book of Mark says that Herod married Herodias: **"For Herod himself having sent forth, he arrested John, and bound him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he mar-**

ried her. For John said to Herod, It is not permitted for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:17-18).

The Bible gives no other details about those marriages. Perhaps Herod married her illegally, without her first being divorced from Philip. However, there are other theories that have been offered. But whatever was the reason, John told Herod he had no right to have Herodias. And that was why Herod put John in prison.

No doubt the reason Herod wanted to kill John was because of Herodias. However, he was afraid of the multitude because they considered John to be a prophet. Regardless of how much power a ruler may have, most of them are afraid of the multitude of the people. That was especially true then because the Roman government would not tolerate a ruler where there was disorder in the population.

Herodias found a way to kill John

- **But Herod's birthday being brought, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she would ask. And she, having been put forward by her mother, says, Give me here on a platter the head of John the immerser.**
- **And he became sad, but because of the oaths, and of those dining together, the king commanded it to be given. And having sent, he beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter, and given to the maiden, and she brought it to her mother** (Matthew 14:6-11).

Herod had no doubt been drinking and was under the influence of too much alcohol. Hence, he made that foolish vow, and Herodias saw her opportunity. Herodias probably persuaded her daughter by telling her that she would give her more than Herod would. For Herod would only give her one gift, while Herodias would give her many gifts for a longer period of time. And a wife like Herodias has the power to get much from their husbands. The story reveals the evil hearts of Herod, Herodias, and her daughter. They were all three very ruthless people, driven completely by selfishness.

Herod did not like her request, but he did not want to deny her. He did not want to deny her because he had made an oath to her in the presence of those dining there with him. For Mark's biography of Jesus says, **"... Herod on his birthday made a dinner for his chiefs, and the high captains, and the leading men of Galilee ..."** (Mark 6:21). Had he denied the daughter of Herodias it would have seemed (1) to be a sign of weakness, unable to give her the head of John the immerser, or (2) that his word was unreliable, not even keeping his oaths.

Jesus heard of John's death

- **And after coming, his disciples took up the body and buried it, and having gone, they informed Jesus. Now when Jesus heard it, he departed from there in a boat into a desolate place in private. And when the multitudes heard of it, they followed him on foot from the cities** (Matthew 14:12-13).

Even though our dead bodies are only of the dust of the earth, respect for the dead body of a righteous man is a righteous thing, and righteous people respect them. Archaeologists who dig up the graves of righteous people are actually grave robbers, and should be rebuked.

The passage says Jesus departed in a boat into a desolate place in private. No doubt his apostles went in the boat with him. Like every man Jesus needed some time for privacy. And desolate areas were the only places he could find it. I suspect because of the occasion, that Jesus went to mourn the death of John. For John the immerser was a mighty man of God whom Jesus loved. Jesus knew that the spirit of John was saved for heaven, but it is natural and right for us to mourn the death of those we love.

Nevertheless, Jesus could not be hidden from the multitudes. And they followed him on foot from the cities. They must have gone around the lake to get to where he was. Consequently, he must have enjoyed a brief time of privacy before the multitudes came again.

Healing the feeble

- **And having come forth, Jesus saw a great multitude, and he felt compassion toward them, and healed the feeble of them** (Matthew 14:14).

That is just another example of the great compassion Jesus had toward the people, especially toward the feeble. The poor and afflicted of the ancient world were especially weak and vulnerable. We of the modern developed world with our social services have little reason to feel the kind of trouble and dejection they felt.

Feeding the multitudes

- **And having become evening, his disciples came to him, saying, The place is desolate, and the hour is now past. Send the multitudes away, so that having gone into the villages, they may buy food for themselves. But Jesus said to them, They have no need to depart. Give ye them to eat. And they say to him, We have not here, except five loaves and two fishes. But he said, Bring them here to me.**
- **And after commanding the multitudes to sit down on the grass, having taken the five loaves, and the two fishes, having looking up to heaven, he blessed. And having broken them in pieces, he gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. And they all ate, and were filled** (Matthew 14:15-20).

His disciples were compassionate men who were concerned about the people's need to eat, because the time was late in the day. When they asked Jesus to send the people out to the villages to purchase food, Jesus told his disciples to feed them. They knew it was impossible for them because they only had five loaves and two fishes. But as Jesus said about another occasion, **"With men, impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible"** (Mark 10:27). Therefore he prepared to feed them.

He first commanded the people to sit on the grass. Luke says about that, **"And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down in groups of fifty each"** (Luke 9:14). That served to

better organize such a large multitude, and also make it better for cooking the fish. Having them in groups of fifty would have been a more convenient size for the many fires needed to cooking.

Mark's report differs somewhat about that. It says, **"And he commanded them to sit down, all by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties"** (Mark 6:39-40). The hundreds were no doubt simply pairs of fifties, which would have been another level of organization, although apparently not commanded by the Lord.

The fish were probably cooked before being eaten to make the meat more edible. That is indicated by this passage about a time Jesus appeared to some of his apostles after his resurrection: **"So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals set, and fish laying on it, and bread"** (John 21:9).

After the people were settled in the groups, Jesus prayed a blessing upon the loaves and fishes. Then he broke them into pieces for his disciples to distribute to the people. And the few loaves and fishes that Jesus was originally given were not used up until there was enough to feed all the people.

There is a story in the Old Testament that is similar to that miracle, but of a much smaller magnitude. It involves the prophet Elisha, who is referred to in the passage as the man of God: **"And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, Give to the people that they may eat."**

"And his servant said, What, should I set this before a hundred men? But he said, Give to the people that they may eat, for thus says Jehovah, They shall eat, and shall leave of it. So he set it before them, and they ate, and left of it according to the word of Jehovah" (Second Kings 4:42-44). Jesus fed fifty times more people with even less food than Elisha was given

No waste or litter

- **And they took up that which remained of the fragments, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children** (Matthew 14:20-21).

There was no waste of that surplus food, nor was any of it left behind as rubbish on the ground. It is sin to waste and litter, especially food. Americans greatly increased their waste and litter of food (and their containers) when they forsook God to become pagan.

Notice also in that passage that only men were numbered. God has never sanctioned equality of women with men, except in our potential to become sons of God for eternity.

Jesus prays on a mountain in private

- **And straightaway Jesus compelled the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, until he would dismiss the multitudes. And having dismissed the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain in pri-**

vate to pray. And having become evening, he was there alone (Matthew 14:22-23).

Jesus obviously wanted more time of privacy. Therefore, he sent his disciples ahead of him to cross the lake. He also dismissed the multitudes because night was approaching. And by nightfall he was alone. Why he went up onto the mountain to pray is not explained. Perhaps that symbolized being closer to his Father in heaven. It may also have given him more isolation.

The Bible mentions several times that Jesus prayed, sometimes in public and sometimes in private. Prayer is something we all should do whenever there are convenient times. Actually, we should always try to keep God in our thoughts, even if only in the background while concentrating on other things. For Paul said, **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing”** (First Thessalonians 5:16-17).

Jesus walked upon the sea

- **But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, being buffeted by the waves, for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking upon the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost, and they cried out from fear. But straightaway Jesus spoke to them, saying, Cheer up. It is I, fear not** (Matthew 14:24-27).

Jesus did not walk on the sea to make life easier for himself. He went to them that way to spare his disciples from having to come back to get him. Moreover, he did not fly effortlessly across the water; he walked. And walking always requires effort, especially if the terrain is rough. And the water was indeed very rough and wavy, so much so that it buffeted the boat. As a result I suspect he walked vigorously and with labor. Therefore, think not that even though Jesus walked on the sea it was easy for him.

Being in the dark of night it was natural for his disciples to think they were seeing a ghost. And we would all be alarmed if we thought we saw a ghost in the dark of night that way. Jesus did not rebuke them for those natural reactions, but instead encouraged them and revealed himself. God knows what it is like to live in this world of darkness and danger. He lived here with us through his Son Jesus Christ.

Peter asks to walk on the water

- **And having answered him, Peter said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the waters. And he said, Come. And having come down from the boat, Peter walked upon the water to go to Jesus.**
- **But seeing the boisterous wind, he was afraid, and having begun to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And straightaway having stretched forth his hand, Jesus took hold of him, and says to him, O thou of little faith, why did thou doubt?**

- **And when they entered into the boat, the wind ceased. And those who came in the boat worshiped him, saying, Thou really are the Son of God** (Matthew 14:28-33).

Peter was always the first to proclaim his trust in Jesus. And this time he was even willing to try walking on the water with him. How many of us would be willing to step out from a boat in the middle of a rough sea at night? Peter was indeed a man of great faith in our Lord.

Peter showed great courage to try walking to Jesus on the water. He was the only one of the apostles who did. And he succeeded for a time, but the boisterous wind distracted him and he became afraid. That is when he began to sink. There is, of course, a great lesson in that story. Certainly none of us will ever walk on water the way Peter first did. But we can do great things that require strong faith. And we should always resist allowing the turbulence around us to cause us to fear and fail. Of course, we should always live prudently and wisely, and be sure whatever we do is according to the will of God.

That experience was another of the many wonders Jesus performed that only his apostles were able to see. Nevertheless, we can all see those things through the eyes of our faith in their testimony. And the stronger our faith the clearer we can see them, although not in their literal detail, which is irrelevant for us anyway.

Wanting to just touch his garment

- **And when they crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. And when they recognized him, the men of that place sent into that whole region round about, and brought to him all those faring badly. And they besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched were healed** (Matthew 14:34-36).

By this time Jesus' reputation as a healer was widely known, and wherever he went people brought sick people for him to heal. And his power was so great that merely touching the hem of his garment healed them. Remember how the woman with the issue of blood was healed by simply touching the edge of his garment (see Matthew 9:20). The woman was healed because of power that Jesus had. For he said to her, **"Who touched me? For I perceived power having gone forth from me"** (Luke 8:46).

Jesus had that power because God was with him, as he said to his apostles: **"The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works"** (John 14:10). Hence, as many of the sick that touched him, even his garment, were healed.

The land of Gennesaret was a fertile plain on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, about half way between Tiberius and Capernaum.

Hypocrisy about obeying God

- **Then scholars and Pharisees from Jerusalem come to Jesus, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.**

- **And having answered, he said to them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God, because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and thy mother, and, He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him perish in death. But ye say, Whoever may say to the father or the mother, Whatever thou might have benefited from me is an offering. And he will, no, not honor his father or mother. And ye have annulled the command of God because of your tradition.**
- **Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, This people comes near me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:1-9).**

The scholars and Pharisees said that a man's offerings could annul God's commandment that he was to give support to his father and mother. Those men were hypocrites who coveted the worldly recognition and gifts they received more than caring for needy fathers and mothers.

Honoring traditions more than the commands of God is still very commonly done, even among those who claim to follow Jesus. The traditions of men have been, and continue to be major causes of division among believers. And Jesus gave the reason why when he quoted from the book of Isaiah: **"This people comes near me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men"** (Isaiah 29:13).

Their hearts are far distant from God because they prefer their own ways of obeying him, which ways are in vain. The two most common of those vain ways are (1) allowing their religious leaders to think for them and tell them what to do, and (2) believing the doctrine of salvation by faith only, which dismisses things like immersion for the remission of sins as being unnecessary.

What defiles a man

- **And having called in the multitude, he said to them, Hear and understand. Not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles the man (Matthew 15:10-11).**

What Jesus said was not to be understood in the physical sense. For it is undeniable that toxic things taken into the mouth are harmful to the body. Jesus was emphasizing the greater importance of spiritual cleanliness over material cleanliness. And the toxic things coming out of a man's mouth are what defile his spirit. Jesus explained those things more fully to his disciples farther on.

Blind leaders of blind men

- **Then having come near, his disciples said to him, Know thou that the Pharisees were offended when they heard the saying? But having answered, he said, Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant, will be uprooted.**

Leave them. They are blind leaders of blind men, and if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:12-14).

Jesus did not care that he offended the Pharisees by what he said. His allegiance was to his heavenly Father and not to the world. He knew those men did not belong to God, because their hearts were not right. And every man who makes his heart wrong in the sight of God will be “uprooted.”

With those words Jesus was not promoting the idea that each man is personally predestined to be of God or not. The plants that God plants are the souls of men who make their spirits right in his sight. God plants wheat and not tares. And in a figurative sense every man makes himself either a grain of wheat or a grain of a tare.

God hardens the heart, blinds the eyes, and stops the ears of every man who makes himself unworthy, lest he turn and be healed. Remember this passage: **“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Lo, send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed”** (Isaiah 6:8-10).

God does not want unworthy men to be saved for his heavenly kingdom. And any foolish man that follows leaders who have been blinded by God, instead of listening to the word of God will himself fall with them. The only way to avoid that peril is by repenting of our sins and becoming childlike in our heart, which means to search for the truth of God in his holy word, the Bible, with a humble and open mind.

Those Pharisees were spiritually blind men who were leading many astray from the truth of God. And there have been, and continue to be many religious men who are spiritually blind. And those who are leaders among them are leading many souls astray. Beware of such blind men. Strive to learn the truth of God so you will not fall into spiritual ditches with them. I grieve to say that the leaders of the Catholic church and most of the protestant churches are blind leaders of the blind. Do not think you will be spared if you follow them.

Explaining what defiles a man

- **And having answered, Peter said to him, Explain this parable to us. And Jesus said, Are ye also still without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that everything entering into the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into a toilet?**
- **But the things coming out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile the man. For from the heart comes forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnessings, revilings. These are things defiling the man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man** (Matthew 15:15-20).

In that passage Jesus explained what he meant by things defiling a man. When Peter asked him to explain it, Jesus chided him for not yet understanding. Study vigorously to understand the word of God, lest you too be chided for not understanding. We who have the

Bible so readily available to us will have no excuse in the day of judgment for not understanding the necessary teachings of God's word. Strive not to **"be called least in the kingdom of the heavens"** (Matthew 5:19).

The things coming out of the mouth are spiritual because they come from the heart. And Jesus listed a few examples of such defiling things. Eating with unwashed hands does not defile the spirit of a man, although it could certainly defile his body.

As examples of things that defile a man, Jesus mentioned

evil thoughts
murders
adulteries
fornications
thefts
false witnessings
revilings

Regarding evil thoughts, living in this sin filled world means it is impossible not to have evil thoughts enter into our minds. However, those things do not defile us. It is when we allow them to come out of us in our behavior that we are defiled. And when men begin to harbor and encourage evil thoughts within them, that is the beginning of doing evil things. For most evil behavior is preceded by evil thoughts. Therefore, always resist evil thoughts, and strive to put them out of your mind. Condemn them within your heart before they tempt you to sin. Destroy them the way you would destroy vermin in your house.

Murders, adulteries, thefts, and false witnessings are all forbidden in the ten commandments. However, in the nations of the world only murders and thefts are classified as crimes. And false witnessings are only considered crimes in court testimony or sometimes if used to defame. Nevertheless, vitually everyone condemns false witnessings. Adulteries and fornications are only condemned by a moral people; their acceptance is a sign of spiritual decadence. To revile means to use abusive and contemptuous language. It too is associated with spiritual decadence.

Notice how only two of those things Jesus mentioned literally come out of our mouths, namely, false witnessings and revilings. But as he said, all of them do come out of our hearts, and they do indeed defile us. Therefore, to keep yourself pure, avoid all such things.

The great faith of a Gentile mother

- **And having gone out from there, Jesus departed into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman having come out from those regions, cried out to him, saying, Be merciful to me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously demon-possessed. But he answered her not a word.**
- **And his disciples having approached, they besought him, saying, Send her away, because she cries out behind us. But having answered, he said, I was**

not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But having come, she worshiped him, saying, Lord, help me.

- **And having answered, he said, It is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the house dogs. But she said, Yes, Lord, for even the house dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus having answered, said to her, O woman, great is thy faith. Be it done for thee as thou desire. And her daughter was healed from that hour (Matthew 15:21-28).**

There are some marvelous lessons in that story. Jesus first ignored the pleas of the Canaanite woman. When she continued, he turned to her and refused her request. When she continued to plead, he first said he was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. God was first fulfilling his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their ancestors were first given the opportunity of the kingdom of God.

Notice also, Jesus did not say he was sent to all of the population of Israel, but only to the lost sheep of it. God does not want sinners in his kingdom. He wants souls who are humble and lowly, and who love truth and righteousness. Such souls are called his sheep. And many such souls are lost in the spiritual darkness of this sinful world. Jesus was sent by God to save them, but first to those of the house of Israel.

Jesus then rebuffed the woman by saying that helping her would be like giving the children's bread to dogs. A woman of less faith would have stormed away angrily at those words. However, she was a humble and wise woman who believed in Jesus and knew how to persist. For she loved her daughter, and would take any insult just to have her healed.

Therefore, she accepted being called a dog. But to further her plea, she told him that even the house dogs get the crumbs. That took a great amount of humility and faith. And it won for her what she requested. Jesus even complimented her on her great faith. And the story about her has been permanently recorded in the Bible.

Therefore, if you have a just cause to plead before God, do not be impatient. Have great faith to humbly persist and wait for the time when God will answer you. Remember the example of that humble Canaanite woman.

Multitudes gathered to be healed

- **And having departed from there, Jesus came near the sea of Galilee. And having gone up onto the mountain, he sat there. And many multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, crippled, and many others. And they placed them beside Jesus' feet, and he healed them, so as for the multitudes to marvel seeing the mute speaking, the maimed healthy, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel (Matthew 15:29-31).**

Jesus may have gone up onto a mountain so that he would not be overwhelmed by the multitudes seeking to be healed. He also may have gone up onto a mountain so that he could better see the multitudes and preach to them. The common people glorified God because of all the marvelous good that Jesus was doing. Remember however, the scholars

and Pharisees accused him of being allied with the devil. Therefore, not everyone glorified God because of Jesus. So it is today, and so it has always been.

Feeding four thousand men

- **And Jesus having summoned his disciples, he said, I feel compassion toward the multitude because they continue with me now three days and do not have what they might eat. And I do not want to dismiss them without food, lest they might faint on the way.**
- **And his disciples say to him, From where are so many loaves for us in a wilderness so as to feed so great a multitude? And Jesus says to them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few small fishes.**
- **And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the ground. And after taking the seven loaves and the fishes, having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. And they all ate and were filled.**
- **And they took up seven hampers full of the fragments that remained. And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And having dismissed the multitudes, he entered into the boat, and came into the regions of Magdala (Matthew 15:32-39).**

Remember, Jesus had earlier fed five thousand men with only five loaves and two fishes, and they took up twelve baskets of the fragments that remained. This time he fed four thousand men with seven loaves and a few small fishes, and they took up seven hampers full of the fragments that remained. The Greek word for basket is different from the one for hamper. Why the two different kinds of containers are mentioned is not told. It is just another one of those interesting but unimportant items of trivia. Notice again how there was no waste nor litter of the fragments that remained.

Magdala was a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Demanding a sign from the sky

- **And the Pharisees and Sadducees who came, testing, demanded him to exhibit to them a sign from the sky. But having answered, he said to them, When it becomes evening, ye say, Fair weather, for the sky is red. And at morning, Bad weather today, for the sky is red, being gloomy.**
- **Hypocrites! Ye indeed know how to discern the face of the sky, but the signs of the times ye are not able. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet. And having left them behind, he departed (Matthew 16:1-4).**

Jesus had just fed four thousand men with only a seven loaves and a few small fishes. That was a great sign that God was with Jesus. Nevertheless, those Pharisees and Sadducees

could not accept such signs as being from God. Instead, they demanded some spectacular sight in the sky.

Jesus showed how they were hypocrites, for they could read the signs of the weather, but they were blind to all the great signs that Jesus was showing the people that he from God. They were blind to it because they really did not want to hear the truth. They were too committed to their own unrighteousness, which Jesus was condemning.

The sign of Jonah was that Jesus would be buried in the ground for three days and three nights, but would rise again. Jonah had been swallowed by a sea creature for three days and three nights. Here is part of that story: **“And Jehovah prepared a great sea creature to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to Jehovah his God out of the sea creatures belly. ... And Jehovah spoke to the sea creature, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land”** (Jonah 1:17-2:10).

A red sky in the morning indicates clear weather in the east but gloomy weather in the west; the morning sunlight from the east shining on the dark clouds (being gloomy) to the west. And since the weather generally moves from west to east, that means bad weather was coming. On the other hand, a red sky in the evening means the sky was clearing in the west because the sun was setting to the west. Hence, fair weather was coming.

The leaven of the Pharisees

- **And his disciples having come to the other side, they forgot to take loaves. And Jesus said to them, Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And they deliberated among themselves, saying, We took no loaves. And having known it, Jesus said to them, O ye of little faith, why do ye deliberate among yourselves because ye brought no loaves?**
- **Do ye not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up, nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many hampers ye took up? How do ye not understand that I spoke to you not about bread, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?**
- **Then they understood that he said not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees** (Matthew 16:5-12).

A tiny amount of leaven in the dough will have a great affect on the loaf, one that makes it much more desirable. In the same way the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees had the potential to have a great affect on a man's life, but with a very undesirable affect, a harmful effect. It was like a small amount of poison in a loaf. What they taught was a perverted religion and a corrupted morality. Therefore, Jesus warned his disciples about them. And there are many men today that are like them.

Who men thought Jesus was

- **Now when Jesus came into the regions of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some, John the immerser, others, Elijah, but others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matthew 16:13-14).**

God does not reveal himself to the world to make his existence obvious. He certainly could. He could make his existence even more obvious to the world than the sun is in the sky. He does not make his existence obvious to the world because he want us to search for him.

Paul told of that when he was speaking to the Athenians: **“The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things.**

“And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us. For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring” (Acts 17:24-28).

Requiring us to grope for him to find him is one way God tests the character of our spirits. And the testing of the worthiness of our spirit is the major purpose of our existence in the world. Worthy souls will search to find God because they seek things higher and nobler than those of the world.

Therefore, Jesus did not publicly proclaim himself to be the Christ, the Son of God. Scoffers say he did not proclaim himself because he doubted who he was. They are liars who deny the truth of the Bible record which says he did. They deny the truth of the word of God because they do not know God. Indeed, they do not want to know him, because they hate his ways.

When Jesus was on the earth most men did not recognize him as the Christ. Some confused him with John the immerser. Some thought he was the reincarnation of a former prophet of God. But most of them recognized him as a prophet. Most men did not recognize him as the Christ because they had a misconception about what the Christ would be like. They expected the Christ of God, the Messiah, to be a great and mighty warrior-king who would bring Israel to greatness in the world. Jesus was nothing like that.

The true Christ of God came to establish a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens, not a kingdom of the world. As he said to Pilate the governor, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).**

Peter knew who he was

- **He says to them, But who say ye, I am? And Simon Peter having answered, said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And having answered, Jesus said to him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father in the heavens (Matthew 16:15-17).**

Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God because of the evidence he had seen. For one thing, John the immerser testified that Jesus was the Christ: **“And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou wilt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God”** (John 1:32-34).

Peter not only believed the testimony of John, but he had seen other evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Indeed, as Jesus said, God the Father himself had testified about him. God revealed who Jesus was, not with words but with power. Peter and the other apostles had seen Jesus perform many mighty signs and wonders that could only have been done with the power of God.

Jesus mentioned God’s testimony of him to the Jews, when he said, **“But I have testimony greater than of John [the immerser], for the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me”** (John 5:36). It was not his flesh and blood—his physical appearance—that revealed who he was.

Nevertheless, it took great courage for Peter to confess Jesus as the Christ, because the Jews excommunicated from the synagogue every man who did, as this passage tells: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43). Therefore, it took great courage for any Jew to confess him. Hence, Jesus blessed Peter for his confession.

Building Christ’s church

- **And I also say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).**

Jesus did not mean he was going to build his church upon Peter, because Peter eventually died like all men do. The rock that Jesus meant was the faith of Peter. And it is upon faith that Jesus built his church. Faith is more than simply believing. The rock of faith upon which he built his church is an obedient and trusting faith in him, and that never dies.

Hades is the abode of the dead. When we die our bodies perish. However, all who belong to Christ, who are part of his church, will rise in spirit from the dead. The gates of Hades, entrance into death, will not prevail against the church of Christ. Entrance into death will

not prevail over us who belong to him, because Jesus became our Redeemer, saving our souls from the condemnation of death.

Peter given the keys of the kingdom

- **And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens** (Matthew 16:19).

The keys of the kingdom of the heavens that Jesus said he would give to Peter, was the authority to open its gates. And that is what Peter did soon after Jesus ascended into heaven. Peter opened the gates to the Jews when he said to them on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all those in afar, as many as the Lord our God may call”** (Acts 2:38-39). The gift of the Holy Spirit includes membership in the kingdom of the heavens, which is Christ’s church.

Peter also opened the gates of the kingdom to the Gentiles later, when he preached to Cornelius the Roman centurion (see Acts 10). The keys that Jesus gave to Peter were only used to open the gates of the kingdom. And now that it is open it will never be closed as long as the world exists. Once those “keys” were used they are no longer needed.

However, after the end of the world, and the final judgment, there will no longer be an open invitation to enter in. If we do not avail ourselves of that opportunity in this life, it will never again be offered. Those who neglect it will be like the five foolish virgins in the parable who did not prepare for the wedding. When they came too late, they cried out **“Lord, Lord, open to us.”** But he said to them, **“Truly I say to you, I know you not.”** Jesus then said to the people, **“Watch therefore, because ye know not the day or the hour in which the Son of man comes”** (Matthew 25:11-13).

Binding and loosing

- **And whatever thou may bind on earth will be what is bound in the heavens, and whatever thou may loose on the earth will be what is loosed in the heavens** (Matthew 16:19).

Jesus also spoke those words later to all of his disciples: **“Truly I say to you, however many things ye may bind on the earth will be things that are bound in heaven, and however many things ye may loose on the earth will be things that are loosed in heaven”** (Matthew 18:18). We know (from the Greek) that what Jesus said was not limited to Peter, because the word ye in that passage is plural.

What Jesus is saying in those words is that God in heaven supports whatever we do on the earth. God supports us as long as what we bind or loose is according to his will. For the apostle John said, **“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”** (First John 5:14). And whatever is good and right and just, and wise, is according to his will.

Tell no man he is the Christ

- **Then he commanded his disciples that they should tell no man that he is Jesus, the Christ** (Matthew 16:20).

Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim he was the Christ while he was still upon the earth. It was only after Jesus ascended into heaven that Peter used the “keys” that Jesus gave him to open the kingdom of the heavens. It was then that he and the other apostles began to proclaim Jesus was the Christ. That is what Peter told the Jews during his first sermon to them: **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36).

One reason Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim him is because the people completely misunderstood what the Christ would be like. If he and his disciples had proclaimed he was the Christ, the people would have made him their earthly king. That is what the multitude tried to do after he fed five thousand men with only five barley loaves and two fishes.

For the record says, **“When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone”** (John 6:14-15). If Jesus allowed them to do that it would have provoked a civil war against the Romans. The book of Acts describes some examples of that kind of revolt by other men (see Acts 5:35-36).

Jesus’ mission in the world was to prepare the people for the kingdom of the heavens. It is a spiritual kingdom, and it was not established until after he was resurrected into heaven. Publicly proclaiming he was the Christ would have interfered in many ways and prevented the fulfillment of God’s plans for him on the earth.

Therefore, Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim that he was the Christ. Only he had the duty, the right, and the power to proclaim he was the Christ, and he only did in private. Jesus only gave his disciples that duty, right, and power after he departed from the earth. When Jesus had earlier sent them out before him, it was for them to proclaim the kingdom was near, not that Jesus was the Christ.

Warning them about his suffering and death

- **From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, and chief priests, and scholars, and be killed, and the third day be raised up** (Matthew 16:21).

Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his suffering and death by the rulers of the Jews. Jesus knew how stressful that would be for them. Not only would it be a great challenge to their faith, but their lives would be in danger because of their association with him. The Jewish rulers were vicious men who wanted to destroy them. Therefore, Jesus also encouraged them by saying he would be raised the third day.

Peter and Jesus rebuke each other

- **And having taken him aside, Peter began to rebuke him, saying, Be merciful to thee, Lord. This will, no, not be to thee. But having turned around, he said to Peter, Go thee behind me, Satan. Thou art my stumbling-block, because thou regard not the things of God, but the things of men (Matthew 16:22-23).**

Peter was convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and he was full of zeal for him. However, his zeal was sometimes misguided, and this time it caused him to contradict Jesus.

Peter even rebuked Jesus for saying he would suffer that way and be killed. Peter could not accept that as ever happening. He told Jesus to be merciful to himself, meaning he should not fear such a thing happening. And Peter boldly assured him it would not happen. No doubt Peter thought he was supporting Jesus by saying his suffering and death that way would not happen. Peter contradicted Jesus because he did not understand the necessity of Jesus suffering that way.

Instead of explaining to Peter why that must happen, Jesus rebuked him. He turned his back on Peter and commanded him to get behind him. He even called him Satan (which word meant adversary) for being a stumbling-block to him. Peter was reasoning like men and not like God. Just a moment before that, Jesus praised Peter for his faith in him. But when Peter rebuked and contradicted Jesus, then Jesus rebuked him severely, calling him Satan.

Peter also contradicted Jesus during the last supper when Jesus said they would all forsake him that night. Peter said he would never deny him. However, Peter did deny him that very night, not once but thrice. And that taught Peter an essential lesson for him, because it made him more humble. It also taught him to never contradict anything Jesus said, regardless of what it was. And we should do the same, including any of his commandments, even if we do not understand the reason for them. If we believe in him then we must trust him without always needing to understand.

Losing our lives to save them

- **Then Jesus said to his disciples, If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 16:24-25).**

Jesus said those words about denying ourselves after rebuking Peter for opposing his death by the rulers of the Jews. Jesus said we must lose our lives for his sake in order to find them. But of course, that does not mean we must all literally die. It means we must give up everything that is not part of his righteousness, everything that is selfish about us, everything that we would gain by conforming to the world of sin.

Both Mark and Luke report that Jesus qualified what he said about a man losing his life to find it. He said a man will save his life, if he will lose it because of him and the good news

(see Mark 8:35 and Luke 9:24). It is only by losing our lives for the cause of Christ and his good news of our salvation that we will save it.

And remember, taking up our cross means enduring the trials and tribulations of living a faithful Christian life, regardless of what they may be. It means being longsuffering in our obedience to him. It means accepting whatever hardships we face in living for him and promoting his kingdom and his righteousness. Losing our lives that way enables us to find eternal life. For Jesus said to the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). That is truly finding life—for all who believe and obey him.

What does it profit a man

- **For what does it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?** (Matthew 16:26).

Losing our soul to gain the whole world is a very bad and foolish bargain. Remember what Solomon said about living in this world: **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3), and, **“It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith”** (Ecclesiastes 1:13). The very best we can have in this life is a few years of pleasure. And relative to eternity the longest life in this world is but for a moment.

Indeed, as Jesus indicated, there is nothing so valuable that is worth losing our soul to gain. For each one of us the most valuable thing we have is our soul, and the most valuable thing we could ever gain for it is eternal life in heaven with Christ. Every man will realize that on the day of judgment after this world is over. But for those who deny him in this life it will be too late. And disobeying his commandments is denying him, regardless of what a man says with his lips.

As the apostle John said, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man. But whoever keeps his word, truly in this man the love of God is fully perfected. By this we know that we are in him”** (First John 2:3-5).

Rewarded according to our actions

- **For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his agents, and then he will reward each man according to his actions** (Matthew 16:27).

Jesus also told how he is going to reward each man according to his actions when this world is over. He will reward us with good beyond measure if we forsake our selfish lives and endure suffering for his sake. And he will reward sinners with punishment in the fires of hell because they lived selfishly and sinfully for their own pleasures. Each man will be rewarded, not by his faith only, but by his actions.

Regarding the return of Jesus, unlike popular teachings that say otherwise, he will never again live upon this earth. When he returns he will come in the glory of the Father with his agents. And that will happen at the end of the world. Moreover, he will return in the clouds of the sky not upon the earth.

When Jesus was describing the end of the world, he said, **“And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky. And then all the tribes of the earth will beat the breast, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and much glory. And he will send forth his agents with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the boundaries of the heavens—as far as their boundaries”** (Matthew 24:30-31).

The kingdom was coming soon

- **Truly I say to you, there are some of those who stand here, who will, no, not taste of death, until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom** (Matthew 16:28).

Jesus was given his kingdom when he completed his sinless life in obedience to the Father. And since he appeared to some of his disciples after he was resurrected, that is how they saw him coming in his kingdom. After his ascension into heaven his apostles established his church, which is his kingdom on the earth. Remember, Peter was given the keys to open its gates.

Jesus is transfigured

- **And after six days Jesus takes Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brings them up onto a high mountain in private. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.**
- **And having responded, Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou desire, we could make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.**
- **And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were exceedingly afraid. And having come, Jesus touched them and said, Arise, and fear not. And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, except Jesus only.**
- **And while they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man will rise from the dead** (Matthew 17:1-9).

The changed appearance of Jesus described in that passage is similar to how Jesus appeared in his heavenly glory to the apostle John in his vision of him: **“And his head**

and hair were white as wool, white as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire ...” (Revelation 1:14).

The body of Jesus was temporarily transfigured on the mountain. But after his resurrection his transfiguration to a glorious body in heaven is permanent. And we too will be permanently transfigured when we are resurrected after this life is over. As Paul said, **“For our citizenship exists in the heavens, from which also we await a Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness, in order for it to become similar in form to the body of his glory, according to the working of his power even to subject all things to himself”** (Philippians 3:20-21).

Matthew simply says that Moses and Elijah appeared to them and spoke with Jesus. However, Luke tells how Moses and Elijah also appeared in glory. Luke also tells what they were saying to him: **“And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah, who, having appeared in glory, spoke of his departure, which he was going to fulfill at Jerusalem”** (Luke 9:30-31).

That means they spoke to him about his crucifixion and resurrection at Jerusalem. Jesus was going to fulfill those things because he prophesied they would happen. Those things were perhaps the greatest events that ever happened or ever will happen. They are so great because they enabled Jesus to defeat God’s enemies, and redeem the souls of all who love him. And that enabled God to achieve his goal of having many sons in heaven, sons who would always love, trust, and obey him. For that seems to have been the reason God began to create things to begin with, things in heaven and on the earth.

There is an important lesson for us about the Old Testament in that story. Moses symbolized the law, and Elijah symbolized the prophets. And the law and the prophets symbolize the Old Testament. For example, when Jesus spoke what we call the golden rule, he said, **“All things therefore, as many as ye may want that men should do to you, so also do ye to them, for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12). In other words, that rule epitomizes the teachings of the Old Testament.

When Peter put Moses and Elijah equal with Christ, God spoke directly to tell him that Jesus was superior to all. For he was God’s beloved Son, and what he taught supersedes the law and the prophets.

When the disciples heard the voice of God, they fell on their faces, and were exceedingly afraid. It must have been a very awesome sound, perhaps like the sound of rolling thunder that was very loud.

That was the second time the record tells how God spoke directly from heaven to say that he was well pleased with his beloved Son. The first time was when Jesus was immersed by John: **“And when Jesus was immersed, he went up straightaway out of the water. And lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and coming upon him. And lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (Matthew 3:16-17). However, I doubt when God spoke that time it was as awesome sounding as when he responded to Peter.

Why Jesus only took Peter, James, and John with him on the mountain is not told. However, Paul later did speak of them as being known as pillars (of the church), when he said, **“But from those who were reputed to be something (what kind they were formerly, it**

makes no difference to me, God does not accept a personage of man), for those who were of repute added nothing to me, but to the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the good news for men of uncircumcision, as Peter for men of circumcision (for he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles), and James and Cephas [Peter] and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, when they understood the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship” (Galatians 2:6-9).

Paul said that Peter, James, and John were reputed to be pillars. Therefore, those three men being reputed to be pillars by the other disciples indicates they were considered by Jesus as being more worthy of recognition, because God is impartial (see Acts 10:34). That would explain why he chose them to see his transfiguration. And if you want to perceive in your heart some of his glory, then make your spirit the best you can in his sight.

John was the Elijah prophesied

- **And his disciples questioned him, saying, Why then do the scholars say that Elijah must first come? And having answered, Jesus said to them, Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things. But I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they knew him not, but did to him how many things they wanted. Likewise also the Son of man is going to suffer by them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the immerser (Matthew 17:10-13).**

The book of Malachi is the last one in the Old Testament, and its last words speak of God sending Elijah: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).**

Elijah was a prophet of God, and he was one of only two men that the Bible says were taken directly to heaven without first having died. For the record says, **“And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and his assistant Elisha] still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which divided them both apart. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (Second Kings 2:11).**

When Jesus’ disciples asked him about the prophecy of Elijah coming, he told them that Elijah had already come, but they did not recognize him and they persecuted him. The disciples then knew he was speaking about John the immerser. John came in the spirit of Elijah, having the same kind of character and way of life, not Elijah himself. And the Jews did not understand that. They expected the literal body of Elijah, because Elijah had been taken into heaven directly without ever having died.

His disciples could not heal a boy

- **And when they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling to him, and saying, Lord, be merciful to my son, because he is lunatic, and suffers badly. For he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I**

brought him to thy disciples, and they could not heal him (Matthew 17:14-16).

The man's son was apparently suffering some kind of epilepsy caused by a demon, because the next passage says, **"And Jesus rebuked it, and the demon departed from him."** While Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, his other disciples attempted unsuccessfully to cast it out. Remember, Jesus had given them the power to cast out demons when he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of the heavens (see Matthew 10:7-8).

This story about the afflicted son is also mentioned in the biography of Jesus by Mark: **"And having answered, one from the multitude said, Teacher, I brought my son to thee, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it tears him, and he foams, and gnashes his teeth, and becomes limp. And I spoke to thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they were not able"** (Mark 9:17-18).

And it is also mention in the one by Luke: **"And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, saying, Teacher, I beseech thee to look upon my son, because he is the only begotten to me. And lo, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out, and it convulses him with foaming. And it departs from him difficultly, injuring him. And I begged thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they could not"** (Luke 9:38-40).

Both of those records say the father blamed a spirit (an evil spirit) for his son's illness, while in the record here by Matthew the father simply says the boy was lunatic. The story by Mark also says the boy had a mute spirit.

The different biographies of Jesus provide a variety of information about his life. And that enables us to understand him better. For it is always better to examine anything from several different views or perspectives. The different testimonies also strengthen our faith that he is the Son of God. For the testimony of several men is always more powerful and convincing than the testimony of one.

Jesus rebukes that generation

- **And having answered, Jesus said, O faithless and perverted generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you?** (Matthew 17:17).

It is not clear why Jesus spoke those words at that time. He was certainly disappointed with the multitudes. For example, he once said to them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled"** (John 6:26). That was the day after he had fed the five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. He also said to the people of Jerusalem, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I wanted to gathered thy children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not"** (Matthew 23:37).

Perhaps that rebuke about the faithless and perverted generation was because his disciples also showed weak faith. Jesus had such a powerful faith in his heavenly Father that he was no doubt deeply disappointed about how little faith even his chosen disciples had.

And I fear his rebuke can apply to all of us. Are we not all faithless and perverted compared with what we could be? I certainly feel that way. As Paul said, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23). There are countless ways I have fallen short of the glory of God. Yet I cannot brood about my past sins and failures. I must keep striving to do better.

The book of Mark also includes this dialogue between Jesus and the boy’s father. The man said to him, **“But if thou can do anything, help us, having compassion toward us.”** Jesus answered him, **“If thou are able to believe, all things are possible to him who believes. And straightaway the father of the child having cried out, he said with tears, I believe. Lord, help thou my unbelief”** (Mark 9:22-24).

The father’s strong emotional reaction shows how desperate he was for his son to be healed. And his plea could also be one for all of us: We believe. Lord, help thou our unbelief. Even though we believe, yet our faith is too often inadequate, containing elements of unbelief. Therefore, it is good for us to plead that the Lord will help us defeat whatever unbelief we have that remains to hinder us.

Jesus explains why they could not cast it out

- **Bring him here to me. And Jesus rebuked it, and the demon departed from him. And the boy was cured from that hour. Then the disciples having come to Jesus in private, said, Why could we not cast it out? And Jesus said to them, Because of your unbelief.**
- **For truly I say to you, if ye have faith as a grain of a mustard plant, ye will say to this mountain, Remove from here to there, and it will depart, and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting** (Matthew 17:17-21).

Jesus’ disciples were puzzled why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus told them that kind of demon does not go out except by prayer and fasting. Perhaps the reason Jesus was so disappointed with his disciples was because they were too quick to quit trying. For if they had engaged in prayer and fasting then they could have cast the demon out. And one lesson for us is that we should persevere in our righteousness, and not be too quick to give up on a good work. Keep looking for what it takes.

Jesus told how faith, even as small as a grain of a mustard plant, has the power to move a mountain. And relative to his great faith, ours is indeed very small. When he said our faith can move a mountain, I believe he was speaking literally. It may take a long time for faith to move a mountain (even centuries), but Jesus said it will happen. Indeed, mountains (as the Bible calls them) are now commonly moved by the great power of our explosives and earth-moving machines.

When Jesus said that nothing would be impossible to us, he was speaking about things that were righteous, things that conform to God’s will. For consider these words of the apostle John: **“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we may ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him”** (First John 5:14-15). John said that we have what we ask—if it is **“according to his will.”**

Also consider these words of James: **“Ye do not have, because ye do not ask”** (James 4:2). Therefore, it is very important for us to pray and make our requests known to God, because we may not receive if we do not ask. However, James went on to say, **“Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:3). Therefore, even if we ask we will not receive if we just want to indulge our pleasures.

Jesus prophesies his death and resurrection

- **And while they turned back in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up. And they were exceedingly sorry** (Matthew 17:22-23).

That passage says his disciples were exceedingly sorry when they heard those words. They were exceedingly sorry to hear him say he would be killed. They were not sorry he would be raised the third day because they did not understand what he meant. For that same report in the book of Mark says, **“But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to question him”** (Mark 9:32).

Jesus pays the tax

- **And when they came to Capernaum, those who receive the double-drachma came to Peter, and said, Does not your teacher pay the double-drachma? He says, Yes. And when he entered into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, What think thou, Simon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they take taxes or tribute, from their sons or from strangers? And Peter says to him, From strangers. Jesus said to him, Therefore the sons are free.**
- **But, so that we might not offend them, after going to the sea, cast a hook. And take up the first fish coming up, and having opened its mouth, thou will find a four-drachma coin. After taking that, give thou to them for me and thee** (Matthew 17:24-27).

That story teaches us by example to pay our taxes because even Jesus paid them. It also teaches us not to offend people about unimportant issues. Even though Jesus was not obligated to pay taxes, he still paid them so as not to offend. Jesus often offended men about the important things, which is why they crucified him. Therefore, we must not fear to offend about the important issues. But we should try not to offend about the unimportant ones, especially about matters of opinion.

And so be sure that what you say or do that offends some others is fully justified by the word of God. And let not fear of offending others keep you from saying or doing what is good and right and just in the sight of God. Keep these words of Paul in mind: **“For do I now trust men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I were still pleasing men I would not be a bondman of Christ”** (Galatians 1:10). It is God we should want to please, not men.

Notice also how Jesus used that occasion to fortify Peter's faith in him. For it was clearly a miracle for Peter to find that needed coin in the mouth of the first fish he caught, just as Jesus prophesied he would. That is another example of how God uses things to increase the faith of those who believe in him. Peter had strong faith in him, and that occasion helped him to have even stronger faith. Remember what Jesus said about having and receiving: **"For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him"** (Matthew 13:12).

Who is greater in the kingdom

- **In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens? And having called in a child, Jesus set it in the midst of them. And he said, Truly I say to you, if ye are not turned, and become as children, ye will, no, not enter into the kingdom of the heavens. He therefore who will make himself lowly as this child, this man is the greater in the kingdom of the heavens. And whoever will receive one such child in my name receives me** (Matthew 18:1-5).

What Jesus meant by becoming as a child, was for his disciples to become as children in the nature of their spirit: innocent (in the sense of repenting of sin), humble, open-minded, eager to learn, quick to forgive and forget minor offenses. And Jesus said that receiving and welcoming even one such humble Christian is the same as welcoming Christ himself.

Remember however, Jesus did not mean that we should become as children in our intellectual development and emotional control. As Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I reasoned as a child, but when I became a man, I abolished the childish things"** (First Corinthians 13:11), and, **"Brothers, become not children in your thoughts. Instead be childlike in wickedness, but in your thoughts become mature"** (First Corinthians 14:20).

No man who lacks the kind of childlike spirit that Jesus referred to will ever enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Indeed, Jesus even said that those who make themselves the humblest and the lowliest among us are the greater in the kingdom. That is the very opposite of what happens in the world. It is the most proud, aggressive, and self-promoting men who become the greater within the peoples of the world (with rare exceptions).

Notice how Jesus said, **"... if ye are not turned, and become as children ..."** His disciples were concerned about becoming greater in the kingdom of the heavens. Their focus was upon becoming greater. But Jesus told them to turn, turn away from that kind of focus.

Instead, they should strive to make themselves lowly as a child, meaning in the nature of their spirit: innocent, humble, open-minded, eager to learn, and quick to forgive and forget minor offenses. And thus it must be for all of those who want to be his disciples and enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

Punishment for being a stumbling-block

- **But whoever may cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is advantageous for him that a donkey-powered millstone were**

hanged on his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks. For it is necessary that the stumbling-blocks come, yet woe to that man through whom the stumbling-block comes (Matthew 18:6-7).

The devil (in the form of a serpent) caused the innocent Eve to stumble by encouraging her to sin, and he was cursed because of it. Jesus uttered a curse against anyone who encourages a child to commit wrong. He said that whoever did would be better dying a violent death. There were hand-powered millstones, and there were animal-powered ones, which were obviously much larger. Hence, Jesus emphasized the severity of punishment for whoever causes the little children who believe in him to stumble. And what he said applies not just to little children but to any of his sheep.

Jesus then uttered a curse against the world because of how it tempts men to commit wrong. He also said it was necessary for those temptations to come. They are necessary in order for us to be tested. And we must be tested in order to show our worthiness for eternal salvation. Remember, even Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, was tested that way. Only men (in the generic sense) have the opportunity to become sons of God for eternity, because only men live in this evil world filled with temptations. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Nevertheless, a great curse is upon every man through whom stumbling-blocks come. Such men allow themselves of their own free will to be servants of the devil, and they will suffer the punishment of the fires of hell with him.

Sacrificing your body to save your soul

- **And if thy hand or thy foot causes thee to stumble, cut them off and cast from thee. It is good for thee to enter into life crippled or maimed, than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. And if thine eye causes thee to stumble, remove it and cast it from thee. It is good for thee to enter into life one-eyed, than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire (Matthew 18:8-9).**

Jesus taught that exact same lesson in his sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5:29-30). Regarding the repetition of his lessons, we must remember that Jesus taught throughout the land of Israel, and what he taught was mostly the same wherever he went. Hence, the record of his ministry is going to contain a few repetitions of what he said. Besides, repetition is not only a great aid to learning, but it is a way of emphasizing the importance of the words. And there is nothing more important than the salvation of our souls.

What Jesus said about entering into eternal life crippled or maimed or one-eyed is, of course, figurative. It is figurative because our bodies of flesh do not enter eternal life. As Paul said, **“Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:50).

Little children and heavenly agents

- **See that ye not disparage one of these little ones, for I say to you, that in the heavens their agents do always behold the face of my Father in the heavens** (Matthew 18:10).

Those words are a great mystery, because this is the only place in the Bible that says anything about any of us having personal agents in heaven. The book of Daniel does speak about how the nation of Israel had a heavenly agent assigned to them. For one of God's agents said to Daniel, **"But I will tell thee that which is inscribed in the writing of truth. And there is none who holds with me against these, but Michael your prince"** (Daniel 10:21). Daniel was told that Michael was **"the great prince who stands for the sons of thy people"** (Daniel 12:1). And when Jude spoke of Michael, he said he was **"Michael the arch-agent"** (Jude 1:9).

Thus, Israel was assigned their own heavenly agent. And from what Jesus said each one of us is also assigned a heavenly agent. And apparently the agent of every innocent child has direct access to God for its benefit. However, since we all become guilty before God after our conscience develops and we sin, then our personal agent loses his direct access to God. That is further evidence to show how much God loves innocent children. I also speak more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Finding lost sheep

- **For the Son of man came to save that which was lost. What does it seem to you? If it happens a hundred sheep are with some man, and one of them went astray, after going (having left the ninety-nine on the mountains), does he not seek the one going astray? And if he happens to find it, truly I say to you, that he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray** (Matthew 18:11-13).

There are some men who have made their spirits so evil that they are like Satan himself: hopelessly corrupted. King Herod was an example. But for all other men who have become lost in sin, God seeks to recover them. He will not give up on any man if there is any hope for him. And the example in the above passage about the sheep going astray illustrates his great desire for their salvation.

It is significant that Jesus used the example of sheep in those words, because Jesus often referred to those who belong to him as his sheep. Men who love truth and righteousness, and have humble and trusting spirits, are the kind that God wants to save. Remember, Jesus is himself called the Lamb of God (see for example John 1:29). Sometimes men with that kind of spirit become lost in sin, and he seeks to return them.

Notice that Jesus also told of the greater effort expended to return the lost sheep. And it is toward such persons that we as Christians should expend our greater efforts in our service to Christ. We first need to search for them, which is quite a challenge in itself. For the devil uses his disciples to make it difficult for us in many ways.

To help us we can learn how the apostles and the other early Christians evangelized. For example, Paul always went first to the synagogue in the cities he visited. He went wher-

ever there were men who might be seeking truth and righteousness. He never went to saloons and whore houses.

Nevertheless, every generation is different and requires different methods. Many things that were effective in America when I was a child are no longer effective, nor even legal. Therefore, knowing how to effectively evangelize is part of our struggle to save the lost.

Rejoicing more over a lost sheep that was found does not mean greater love for that sheep. It means Jesus loves each one of them. Actually, any sheep that persisted in going astray would give a shepherd more grief than rejoicing.

No child is born to perish

- **So, it is not a purpose before your Father in the heavens, that one of these little ones should perish** (Matthew 18:14).

Men like the Roman Catholic Augustine and the Protestant Calvin created theories that contradict those words of Jesus. And the popularization of their theories has created enormous evil among believers. The evil concept of unconditional election says that souls are predestined either for eternal salvation or for eternal condemnation through no choice of their own.

Promoters of that concept cite some passages they claim teach it. However, their interpretation of those passages is perverted and false. For that idea not only contradicts what Jesus said in the above passage, but it contradicts other clear Bible teaching about how God will judge us by how we use the free will he has given us.

Moreover, the idea of unconditional election makes God partial. But both Peter and Paul said God is not partial. For when Peter saw how God was offering Gentiles the salvation of Christ, he said, **“In truth, I am overwhelmed that God is not partial, but in every nation, he who fears him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to him”** (Acts 10:34-35). And Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“For there is no partiality with God”** (Romans 2:11). The idea of unconditional election makes God unjust and cruel. It is an evil satanic theory.

When men like Paul spoke of predestination, they were speaking about how God predetermined the *type* of men he would save or condemn. And God has given each of us the ability to determine what type of man we will be. Each one of us has the free will to do right or wrong. God does not make that choice for us. It is only after men have permanently chosen to make their spirits evil that God will close their eyes, stop their ears, and harden their hearts to the way of truth.

Reconciliation among brothers

- **But if thy brother should sin against thee, go and reprove him between thee and him alone. If he should hear thee, thou have gained thy brother. But if he should not hear, take with thee one or two besides, so that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he is heedless of them, speak to the church** (Matthew 18:15-16).

That is one of the most violated of Jesus' commands. What he said is simple and easy to understand. It is violated because men do not like it. A few decades ago among secular universities an evil practice began called faculty evaluations. And now even Christian institutions of education use it. They commonly require students at least once a year to complete a form to rate good and bad things about their teachers. They also give students opportunities to write their opinions about them. Those completed forms are then submitted anonymously to the institution's administrators.

That practice allows enormous abuses to develop, including false accusations. For false accusations are a major characteristic of the devil, which word itself means false accuser. And accusations made on those forms are rarely if ever checked for accuracy.

Nevertheless, administrators love them because it gives them special control over the faculty. However, those administrators are very hypocritical about their use, because they themselves would never allow, much less require, the faculty to submit criticisms about the administrators anonymously and without confirmation to the college or university board of directors.

Jesus commanded us to first confront each other directly and privately about our personal grievances. That prevents false accusations and vicious gossip from occurring to poison hearts and spoil the unity and good will that Christ want us to have with each other.

I have seen numerous examples of the destructive power of anonymous false accusations. The most recent one I learned about concerned a church that accused an elderly preacher of stealing funds from their contributions. The elders of his congregation brought that charge against him, but they never gave any evidence. Nevertheless, that preacher was forced to leave and unite with another congregation.

Volumes could be filled with examples of the sorrows created by the violation of that command of our Lord and Savior about how to properly resolve our grievances against each other. Yet the hearts of most Christians remain hardened against it.

When a brother refuses to repent

- **But if he is also heedless of the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the tax collector** (Matthew 18:17).

There are at least two lessons in that passage. First, if a brother refuses to accept the reproof of the church, then he is to be treated as no longer being a Christian. And when Jesus said the church, he meant the entire brotherhood and not just a single congregation. Otherwise, a brother could refuse a proper reproof by one congregation, and still be accepted by all other Christians. And that kind of situation would be a mockery of church discipline. It would be like saying a man could be convicted as a criminal in one city of a country, but would not be treated as guilty in any of the others.

The second lesson is that fellow Christians are to be treated differently from heathens and tax collectors. By heathens Jesus meant the sinners of the world. And by tax collectors Jesus meant those men who were among the most abhorrent in Israel. Therefore, it is a complete misinterpretation to say that Jesus commanded us to love all men as ourselves. He commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves—not all men, including heathens

and tax collectors. Otherwise the command to treat the unrepentant brother as the heathen and the tax collector would be meaningless.

We must apply our love in different ways, depending upon the circumstances. Although we are commanded to love our enemies, we are not expected to love them the same way we love our fellow Christians. And we are not commanded to love our fellow Christians the same way we love our wives and children. Study the Bible and see how differently Jesus loved people. He did not love them all the same way.

And he certainly did not love anyone with the attitude of unconditional love. That is another perverted value of this adulterous generation. God never loves anyone unconditionally. Even babies are not loved unconditionally. They are loved because of their condition of being ignorant and innocent. That foolish concept was invented by an atheist psychologist who was promoting the false ideology of humanism.

Binding and loosing

- **Truly I say to you, however many things ye may bind on the earth will be things that are bound in heaven, and however many things ye may loose on the earth will be things that are loosed in heaven** (Matthew 18:18).

Matthew earlier told how Jesus spoke those words to his apostles: **And whatever thou may bind on earth will be what is bound in the heavens, and whatever thou may loose on the earth will be what is loosed in the heavens** (Matthew 16:19).

What Jesus is saying in those words is that God in heaven supports whatever we (faithful disciples of Christ) do on the earth. God supports us as long as what we bind or loose is according to his will. For the apostle John said, **“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”** (First John 5:14). And whatever is good and right and just is according to his will. And it is from the word of God that we can know what is good and right and just in his sight.

Jesus spoke those words after commanding them to treat as the heathen and the tax collector any disciple who was heedless of the church. And by the church he meant the collective judgment of his faithful disciples, those who were obedient to God. Jesus encouraged them by saying that their condemning judgment about such rebellious disciples who would not try to resolve their disputes among each other as he commanded would be **“bound in heaven.”**

Unresolved disputes among us is a grievous sin in God’s sight; it destroys our love for each other and our unity. Here is some of what Jesus said about those things during the time of the last supper:

A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other. By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other (John 13:34-35).

And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me (John 17:22-23).

When two or more are gathered

- **Again I say to you truly, that if two of you should agree on the earth concerning every matter, whatever they might ask, it will happen for them from my Father in the heavens (Matthew 18:19-20).**

With those words Jesus explained more about what he meant by binding things or loosing them on the earth. Whatever two or more Christians should agree about asking from our Father in the heavens, God will cause it to happen for them. Remember, however, that does not mean literally everything we ask will be given to us. Even Jesus Christ was not allowed to escape his trial and crucifixion, even though he asked God three times, saying, **“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou”** (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Whatever two or more Christians ask God, it will happen for them. But what we ask must be according to his will (see First John 5:14-15). God will comply with our requests, if they are things that he approves. And as with Jesus before his betrayal, there are going to be things we plead with him about that he will not do, because he has a higher and greater purpose for what happens.

Therefore, we must trust him absolutely in every circumstance, because whatever happens to us when we trust him works for our eventual good. As Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

The parable about forgiveness

- **Then Peter having come to him, he said, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times? Jesus says to him, I say to thee, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.**
- **Because of this the kingdom of the heavens is compared to a man, a king, who wanted to settle account with his bondmen. And when he began to settle, one debtor of ten thousand talents was brought to him. But of him not having to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all things, as many as he had, and payment to be made. The bondman therefore having fallen down, worshiped him, saying, Lord, be patient toward me and I will pay thee all. And having felt compassion, the lord of that bondman released him, and forgave him the debt.**
- **But after going out, that bondman found one of his fellow bondmen who owed him a hundred denarii. And having grabbed him, he choked him, saying, Pay me if thou owe anything. So his fellow bondman having fallen down at his feet, besought him, saying, Be patient toward me, and I will pay thee. But he would not, instead, having left him, he cast him into prison until he would pay that which was owed. And when his fellow bondmen saw the things that happened, they were extremely sorry. And after coming, they reported to their lord all the things that happened.**

- **Then his lord having summoned him, he says to him, Thou evil bondman, I forgave thee all that debt because thou besought me. Was it not necessary for thee also to be merciful to thy fellow bondman, as I also was merciful to thee? And having become angry, his lord delivered him to the tormentors until he would pay all that was due to him. So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if ye do not forgive each man his brother, from your hearts, their trespasses (Matthew 18:21-35).**

The concept of forgiveness has been enormously perverted in this decadent and permissive generation of Americans. They have popularized the idea that forgiveness means the guilty party is spared all punishment. That is not the kind of forgiveness Jesus commanded us. Notice first that his command refers to forgiveness among brothers, not the forgiveness of every criminal and vicious offender.

Second, forgiveness in the Bible never means the complete absence of punishment and required recompense. For example, God forgave Moses but he still punished him (see Deuteronomy 3:23-27). God forgave Moses' sister Miriam but he still punished her (see Numbers 12:10-15). God forgave the ancient Israelites in the wilderness but he still cursed that generation to die there (see Numbers 14:20-23).

Forgiveness means we should accept the guilty brother when he repents and not reject him from fellowship. Nevertheless, it still requires the guilty brother to suffer some kind of consequence. There is much to say about forgiveness, of which you can read in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*. Do not be caught in the modern trap of the devil and believe you are obligated to forgive men of even the most heinous crimes. It is a vicious lie, and the disciples of the devil and those deluded by him love to promote it.

Consider these words of the author of Hebrews: **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”** (Hebrews 12:6-7). And Jesus himself said, **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent”** (Revelation 3:19). If God chastens those he loves when they sin, what do you think he does to the wicked, those he does not love?

In Jesus' parable about forgiveness the bondman had originally been forgiven of his great debt. However, that did not mean the man was restored fully to his previous position. It is folly to restore failures to their previous positions of authority and responsibility. A few small mistakes can be ignored, because no man is immune from such things. But major failures require the removal of the man responsible, even though he may be forgiven in the sense of not being completely rejected.

Notice also in the parable that the man's lord “unforgave” him when he proved himself to be so unforgiving. The modern teaching that when God forgives it is forever is false, as that parable clearly illustrates. When men prove unworthy of his forgiveness God will take it away. And that is also true of our salvation from him. We can lose it if we prove unworthy of it. The popular doctrine of once saved always saved is false.

Marriage and divorce

- **And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee and came into the regions of Judea beyond the Jordan. And many multitudes followed him and he healed them there. And Pharisees came to him, trying him, and saying to him, Is it permitted for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?**
- **And having answered, he said to them, Have ye not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother behind, and will be bonded with his wife, and the two will be in one flesh? So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, no man shall separate.**
- **They say to him, Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to divorce her? He says to them, For your hard heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it did not happen this way (Matthew 19:1-8).**

When Jesus said divorce was not from the beginning, he quoted the description in Genesis about the creation of Eve: **“And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:23-24). Notice how the text says the man and his wife would be one flesh. The man and his wife were to be so strongly united in spirit that it was like being one flesh.

The very best marriage in the sight of God is when a man marries one woman only, and they become permanently united in spirit, so united that they become as one flesh. And that oneness should never be broken except in death. For no man should separate the marriage bond. Only when one of them destroys that oneness of unity by fornication can the innocent one divorce and remarry (see the next passage). That command was widely honored in this country until the people decided to reject God and follow the devil.

Nevertheless, that ideal oneness every husband and wife should seek to achieve is not to be an equality, but a working oneness the same way the parts of our body are a oneness. Our head and our hands cannot be given equal authority for control of the body. And God has made the husband to be the head of the wife. For Paul said **“a husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church, and himself the savior of the body”** (Ephesians 5:23). Yet our sinful rulers have robbed husbands of that right, and have given complete legal equality to their wives.

Notice how Jesus said that God allowed the ancient Israelites to go against his will (about divorce) because of the hardness of their hearts. Here is that law about divorce: **“When a man takes a wife, and marries her, then it shall be, if she finds no favor in his eyes, because he has found some unseemly thing in her, that he shall write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she**

has departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's" (Deuteronomy 24:1-2).

About compromises, since God himself compromised from the ideal of his will, then we have that precedent to make our own compromises. For there are going to be times in our lives when the ideal of righteousness cannot be effectively done because of the hardness of hearts. Knowing when those things happen, and knowing how to compromise within the acceptability of God will take a lot of wisdom and knowledge learned from the Bible. I mention that occasional necessity of compromise because of the next thing that Jesus said.

When divorce is permitted

- **And I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife, not for fornication, and will marry another, commits adultery. And he who married her who has been divorced commits adultery** (Matthew 19:9).

That is the ideal God prefers about divorce. What Jesus said is that only the sin of fornication is warranted for divorce. If the woman is not a virgin when she marries, or if she commits adultery afterward, her Christian husband can divorce her. And such a Christian woman has no right in the sight of God to remarry. And whoever marries her anyway is committing adultery in the sight of God. If a husband divorces her for any other reason and marries another woman he is committing adultery in the sight of God. And the rule about fornication no doubt applies to the sexual guilt of the husband as well as to the wife.

Thus, only the guilt of sexual impurity can justify divorce among the disciples of Christ (unbelievers are already condemned). And the guilty party cannot remarry. That shows how very serious sexual impurity is in the sight of God. It is the one sin that destroys the oneness of the husband and his wife. Sexual intimacy is unique among the human race. It is used both for reproduction and to strengthen the bonding of that oneness of flesh. And when that ultimate physical intimacy is violated, the oneness is damaged. That marital oneness created by sexual purity is the ideal.

I must add that the pleasure of marital intimacy is just as sexually pure as virginity. The idea that any sexual pleasure is impure is a great perversion promoted by the Catholic Church. It was Augustine who demonized sexual desire. He claimed all eroticism was an evil created by the sin of Adam and Eve. According to Augustine sexual activity should be a purely mechanical act for the purpose of procreation. And it is amazing how that perverse idea has taken deep root in the world of those who believe in Christ and caused an immeasurable host of evils. The details of the development of that evil idea are too complex and lengthy for this book.

Regarding the ideal of sexual purity that Jesus spoke about, I must remind you that we have the precedent from God to compromise in some circumstances. I have heard men claim it is always adultery to marry any divorced person, based upon a literal and legalistic interpretation of the words, **"... he who married her who has been divorced commits adultery."** Such men have also taught that the marriage of a divorced person, even when they have many children to care for, is adultery and a mortal sin. Therefore, they must separate. Such men would create a host of sorrows and evils to satisfy the literal interpretation of what Jesus said. They are like the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for healing on the

sabbath. They would rather men suffer than violate their rigid legalistic interpretation of commands.

Dear reader, before God I condemn that kind of cruel legalism. Ideally, nobody should marry a person divorced because of their fornication. But this is far from an ideal world. And there are many souls who have been divorced for many other reasons, and then remarried and had children. Yet later in life they have turned to Christ and his good news. Would God approve destroying such marriages to create the equivalent of widows and orphans? I have absolutely no doubt that God will accept such marriages under those circumstances. And there are many other extenuating circumstances about marriage and divorce that pure legalism cannot make right.

There is no substitute for using wisdom and good judgment when applying Jesus' commands. Be not like those cruel Pharisees. Just as the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath, so also God's laws were made for us and not us for his laws. Indeed, we as Christians are now under the law of liberty with him. As Paul said, **"All things are permitted for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are permitted for me, but not all things are constructive"** (First Corinthians 10:23). We are to apply the will of God for us to make things constructive, not destructive.

Being a eunuch for the kingdom

- **His disciples say to him, If the case of the man with his wife is this way, it is not advantageous to marry. But he said to them, Not all men can accommodate this saying, but to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born this way from their mother's belly, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of the heavens. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it"** (Matthew 19:10-12).

Not being able to divorce a wife except for fornication is indeed disadvantageous for a man. For there are numerous other problems that can arise in a marriage to make it more of a burden than a blessing. However, Jesus had taught them that we are required to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. And that "cross" we must bear may involve our marriage. Jesus wants us to sacrifice our selfishness and work for truth and righteousness. And sometimes that struggle involves difficulties in marriage. Jesus does not want us to quit just because the going may get tough. Avoiding difficulties by divorcing often causes more sorrows for others, especially for any children in the family.

However, that does not mean we have no right to separate, because separation may be a more constructive way to manage difficulties in a marriage. That is especially true if the separation is only needed temporarily. For separation can encourage greater striving to solve the marital problems. However, divorce destroys the marriage and any hope for its improvement. Nevertheless, be not legalistic about Jesus' commands, for there can be many complications about separation, especially because of all the bad civil laws and court judgments in pagan America. Seek righteousness wisely in all that you do.

Jesus did not respond directly to their judgment about the disadvantage of marriage. He simply gave an example of not marrying at all. Remember, however, his words about a

man making himself a eunuch were only for **“he who is able to receive it.”** And that ability does not include many men. A prime example of such a man was the apostle Paul who remained unmarried all of his life so that he could serve the cause of Christ without the burden of caring for a wife and children.

Allowing children to come to him

- **Then children were brought to him, so that he would lay his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Allow the children, and do not forbid them to come to me, for of such kind is the kingdom of the heavens. And having laid his hands on them, he departed from there (Matthew 19:13-15).**

Jesus never turned the children away from him, saying about them, **“of such kind is the kingdom of the heavens.”** Jesus had earlier taught more about our need to become as children. Those words are recorded in Matthew 18:15. You can read my comments there about that lesson.

None is good except one

- **And behold one man having come to him, said, Good teacher, what good thing should I do so that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, Why do thou call me good? There is none good except one, God (Matthew 19:16-17).**

That is more evidence that Jesus is not fully equal with God the Father. He confessed that fact numerous times, many of which are recorded in the biography of him written by the apostle John. Only God the Father is absolutely “good,” meaning perfect in every way. For example, God can never be tempted (see James 1:13), but Jesus certainly was.

Be obedient and sacrificial

- **But if thou want to enter into life, keep the commandments. He says to him, Which? And Jesus said, Thou shall not murder. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not testify falsely. Honor the father and the mother, and, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man says to him, All these things I have kept from my youthfulness. What do I lack yet?**
- **Jesus said to him, If thou want to be perfect, go, sell the things being possessed by thee, and give to the poor, and thou will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sorrowing, for he was having many possessions (Matthew 19:17-22).**

In answer to his question about entering into life, Jesus quoted some of the ten commandments plus the law about loving our neighbor. The man, having said he had obeyed those, he asked what he lacked yet. In this report Jesus said, **“If thou want to be perfect”** However in Mark’s biography of Jesus, the Lord said, **“One thing thou lack.”** And in

Luke's biography of Jesus, the Lord said, **"Yet one thing is lacking from thee."** The main difference in the wording is with this record in Matthew. The difference in the wording in Mark and Luke is insignificant, because they say virtually the same thing.

The explanation is that Jesus no doubt said both of those things; namely wanting to be perfect and lacking one thing. Consider this example: The sign placed on the cross of Jesus is recorded differently in the four biographies of him. In Matthew the inscription says, **"THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (Matthew 27:37). In Mark it says, **"THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (Mark 15:26). In Luke it says, **"THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (Luke 23:38). And in John it says, **"JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (John 19:19).

Notice how they all differ in some way. What the complete inscription no doubt said, was "This is Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews." Each of the biographers simply omitted part of the inscription. However, all four of them included the words **"The King of the Jews."** That was the most important part of the inscription. The things each of them omitted were incidental parts, such as the fact he was a Nazarene or that his name was Jesus. The great fact was that he is truly the King of the Jews. Indeed, the Bible says he is **"Lord of lords and King of kings"** (Revelation 17:14).

Those differences in the inscription present a very important lesson about reading the Bible record. Look for the important things recorded, and let not scoffers discourage you about insignificant differences you may find. God tests us in many ways, and such things are just another way he tests our faith in his holy word. Such things enable scoffers to justify themselves, but they also enable believers to search more diligently to find the truth of what it says.

Therefore, regarding what Jesus said to the rich man, I am convinced that each recorder simply reported only part of his words. Thus, all of the words can be revealed by reading all of the reports. Putting the words together, Jesus probably said something like, "One thing thou lack, because if thou want to be perfect then"

The man's need to forsake his love of money was the one thing he lacked to be perfect, and Jesus knew it. Thus, Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor so he would have treasure in heaven, and come follow him. However, that was too difficult for the man, and so he departed, sorrowing.

Our willingness to "lose our life" for him is another way God tests our soul. We all need to examine our lives to see if there is anything that would be a stumbling block in our obedience and service. Jesus certainly does not want each one of us to sell everything we own, give to the poor, and spend the rest of our lives evangelizing. That was the requirement of the rich man, because it was his greatest stumbling block to "losing his life" for Christ. For it did prevent him from following Jesus.

Rich men enter the kingdom difficultly

- **And Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of the heavens difficultly. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the hole of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23-24).**

Remember, Jesus said that where our treasure is there will our heart be also. The heart of the rich is with their wealth and with the great advantages and privileges it gives them. They have much more to sacrifice in order to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, their great wealth is a stumbling block to them. And the history of the world proves what Jesus said about them. Very few men of great wealth have ever genuinely committed themselves to Christ. The sacrifices required are too much for such men.

Regarding the hole of a needle, every other translation that I know about says Jesus spoke about the eye of a needle. However, the original Greek says nothing about an eye of a needle. It says the hole of a needle. It may sound more poetic to say the eye of a needle instead of the hole of a needle, but that is just another example of how men change what the word of God says to make it more appealing to people. Men may be pleased with such changes but God is very displeased. And I seek to please him, not men.

Who then can be saved

- **And when his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? And having looked, Jesus said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:25-26).**

The world thinks rich men are somehow superior. But the word of God does not say they are. For example, Solomon said, **“The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out”** (Proverbs 28:11). Indeed, in the eyes of God rich men are inferior. For example, Jesus said, **“However, woe to you the rich, because ye have received your consolation”** (Luke 6:24).

Jesus’ disciples probably thought rich men were superior, which would explain why they were exceedingly amazed at what Jesus said about the salvation of rich men. Nevertheless, Jesus did not explain about rich men. He used the occasion to teach them how salvation is impossible for all men. No man has or ever will have the power to save his soul. Only God has that power. God can do it because with God all things are possible.

Saving the souls of those who love him, while condemning the souls of those who hate him was probably considered impossible if God was going to always be just. The reason is because all men sin. Therefore, if God is going to condemn those who sin, he must condemn all who sin, including those who love him as well as those who hate him.

That was no doubt considered a dilemma for God before he sent his Son into the world. However, by living a sinless life of perfect obedience in this evil world, Jesus was rewarded with the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. Hence, through Christ, God did what seemed impossible: the salvation of our souls and the condemnation of unrepentant sinners, all with complete justice and impartiality. Jesus also proved that sin was not inevitable. And those things defeated all of God’s enemies.

Reward for the apostles

- **Then having answered, Peter said to him, Lo, we have forsaken all, and followed thee. What then will be for us? And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, that ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man**

will sit on the throne of his glory, ye also will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-28).

That blessing Jesus gave was not just for those who followed him while he was upon the earth, but for every man who follows him during his earthly life. For when Jesus was speaking with the apostle John in his great vision, among the many rewards he said we would have, was, **“He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne”** (Revelation 3:21). And Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“Or know ye not that the sanctified will judge the world?”** (First Corinthians 6:2). The faithful followers of Christ are going to sit upon thrones with Jesus, and will judge, not only the twelve tribes of Israel, but the entire world.

Although Jesus spoke those great words of encouragement to them, they did not yet appreciate how great a blessing it was. For they assumed the Messiah was going to be an earthly king to reign over Israel upon the earth. And so they must have thought he said they would be reigning there on the earth. For after his resurrection, they said to him, **“Lord, do thou restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?”** (Acts 1:6).

However, it was not long after his ascension that the Holy Spirit would descend upon them and taught them what the kingdom of God really means. For Jesus said to them at the last supper, **“But the helper, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you”** (John 14:26).

Rewards for our sacrifices

- **And every man who has forsaken houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, because of my name, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life** (Matthew 19:29).

Not only will the followers of Jesus receive eternal life, but they will receive special blessings here upon the earth for making sacrifices because of his name. And what Jesus said suggests that those who forsake the most for him and the good news will receive the most compensation. Giving up for his sake our houses, or our lands, or any of our closest kin will result in a hundredfold blessing now and eternal life in the end. Therefore, our compensation for such sacrifices will be much greater than what we give up, a hundred fold greater.

Peter reminded Jesus that his apostles had left all and had followed him. And the record shows how they are a good example of the compensation Jesus mentioned. They were all excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue, thus alienating many if not most of their kinfolk. However, they were embraced and loved by their fellow Christians in the kingdom of God, which number was much larger than their kinfolk.

Nevertheless, that promised reward Jesus gave requires an enormous amount of faith. It takes great faith to leave the persons and things dearest to us. There are not many people who do it. Remember however, not all of us will need to leave those things because of Jesus and his good news of salvation. That promise is reserved for those who will need to make that sacrifice in order to be a faithful disciple.

The first and the last

- **But many first will be last, and last, first** (Matthew 19:30).

Jesus' comment about the first and the last refers to our status both here upon the earth and in heaven. Many of those who are last in this life will be first in the next life. And many of those who are first in this life will be last in the next one. There are many things we determine about our lives. But there are also many things that we cannot determine. For example, I did not choose to be born a man in this great and prosperous land. Nobody chooses where or to whom he is born. There is a modern proverb that says, "There but for the grace of God go I," referring to some suffering soul we might see.

Therefore, God is not going to judge us by our status in the world. He will judge us by what we did with what we had. A good example is the story of a poor widow that is told in Mark's biography of Jesus. That poor widow cast into the temple treasury a tiny amount of money, but Jesus said of her, **"Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who are casting into the treasury. For they all cast in from that which is abundant to them, but she from her need cast in all, as many things she had, her whole living"** (Mark 12:43-44).

What will determine our rank in heaven is the character of our spirit. And that is something that we and we alone determine. For even God cannot make us righteous against our will. That is why Jesus spent so much time trying to persuade people. And some of the best souls in the character and quality of their spirit rank least in the world. Such people willingly lose their lives for the cause of Christ (see Matthew 10:39). That is why Jesus said, **"But many first will be last, and last, first."**

The parable about finding workmen

- **For the kingdom of the heavens is compared to a man, a house-ruler, who went out in the early morning at the same time to hire workmen for his vineyard. And having agreed with the workmen for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And having gone out about the third hour, he saw others having stood idle in the marketplace. And he said to those men, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatever would be right I will give you, and they went.**
- **Again having gone out about the sixth and the ninth hour, he did likewise. And having gone out about the eleventh hour, he found others who have stood idle. And he says to them, Why have ye stood here idle the whole day? They say to him, Because no man has hired us. He says to them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatever would be right ye will receive.**
- **And having become evening, the lord of the vineyard says to his manager, Call the workmen, and render to them their wage, having begun from the last until the first. And those who came about the eleventh hour, each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more. And they also received a denarius each.**

- **And when they received it, they murmured against the house-ruler, saying, These last did one hour, and thou have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the heat. But having answered, he said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong. Did thou not agree with me for a denarius? Take thine and go. But I want to give to this last man, as to thee also. Is it not permitted for me to do what I want with my own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last, for many are called, but few chosen** (Matthew 20:1-16).

When I was young and I read this parable I first thought like the workmen who complained, because the way the lord of the vineyard paid them seemed unfair. However, I am now an older and wiser man, and I can see more clearly how the lord of the vineyard was doing right. Throughout history there have been times and places where earning a living is very difficult. Many men have been forced to live “from hand to mouth,” as the saying goes. They did not have cupboards full of stored food. Yet they still had wives and children to feed, as well as themselves.

Notice how all those men wanted to work. The difference in them was the opportunities they had. And the men in the parable who waited the longest time to be hired had the longest time to worry about what they were going to bring home for their families. And you can be sure, spending time worrying about serious things like that is much more grievous than laboring in a harvest. The lord of the vineyard was wise enough to know that. Therefore, as a small gesture of kindness he paid them first and equally with the rest.

And our beloved heavenly Father is going to show great kindness to all those who follow Jesus and labor in this life for his truth and righteousness, no matter what kind of opportunities they may have had. And whatever he judges, it will be good and right and just.

Regarding these words of the house-ruler, **“Is it not permitted for me to do what I want with my own?”** many employers in pagan America no longer have that right. Our sinful rulers together with the bosses of the labor unions have robbed them of that right by creating many restrictive laws and bureaucratic rules. Solomon warned that would happen when a people became sinful: **“For the transgression of a land many are the rulers of it”** (Proverbs 28:2).

Regarding these words, **“So the last will be first, and the first last,”** Jesus said the same thing just before he told the story of the hired workmen: **“But many first will be last, and last, first”** (Matthew 19:30). That story was about how men had allowed themselves to be chosen to labor for the house-ruler. And it told how those chosen last were the first to be paid, while those chosen first were the last to be paid. And they all received the same pay. The workmen who labored more thought that was unfair to them.

Before that story Jesus told how difficult it was for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Then at the end of the story, he said, **“... for many are called, but few chosen.”** Jesus had called the rich young man to follow him, but the man was unable to make the required sacrifice in his life. Consequently, the man did not allow himself to be chosen. But, as Peter said, Jesus’ apostles did make the required sacrifice in their lives and allowed themselves to be chosen.

The workmen in the story had all allowed themselves to be chosen by the house-ruler. Why Jesus told how those chosen last were the first to be paid, while those chosen first were the last to be paid, and they were all paid the same, was perhaps to warn those who are called to accept what God gives them, even if it seems to be unfair. God will reward every man who allows himself to be chosen to work for him, but he will reward us in the ways he judges best, not in the ways we think are best. And if you cannot accept his judgments, then do not follow him. If you cannot accept his judgments, then even if you follow him, it will be in vain for you.

Jesus again prophesies his death and resurrection

- **And while going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples in private on the way, and he said to them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scholars. And they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles to ridicule, and to scourge, and to crucify. And the third day he will rise** (Matthew 20:17-19).

Jesus warned his apostles several times that he was going to be betrayed to the rulers of the Jews who would kill him. Jesus and his apostles were on their way to Jerusalem, and this time he told them it would happen after they arrived there. He also told them how the rulers of the Jews would deliver him to the Gentiles to be abused severely and crucified. Nevertheless, Jesus always told his apostles that he would rise the third day.

Wanting to reign beside him in the kingdom

- **Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, worshiping, and asking something from him. And he said to her, What do thou want? She says to him, Speak that these my two sons may sit, one at thy right hand and one at thy left hand in thy kingdom. But having answered, Jesus said, Ye know not what ye are asking. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am going to drink, or to be immersed the immersion that I am immersed?**
- **They say to him, We are able. And he says to them, Ye will indeed drink my cup, and ye will be immersed the immersion that I am immersed. But to sit at my right hand and at my left hand is not mine to give, but to whom it has been prepared by my Father** (Matthew 20:20-23).

The sons of Zebedee were James and John. Their mother must have heard Jesus say, **“Ask, and it will be given you”** (Matthew 7:7). And like many loving mothers, she was ambitious for her sons. Therefore, she brought them to Jesus, and boldly made her request. But they did not yet realize Jesus would be reigning in heaven, not upon the earth. Nor did they realize the enormous costs that were required to be worthy of receiving such honor.

The cup that Jesus was to drink, and the immersion that he was to endure, both referred to his trial and crucifixion. Although they did not understand that either, they still proudly claimed they were able to endure whatever he did. However, the record shows they were not able. Nor is any man able to endure the kind sufferings that Jesus endured. Neverthe-

less, we must all drink his cup and be immersed his immersion by experiencing some kinds of sufferings in order to remain faithful to him. Our sufferings vary among us, but we must all endure whatever they are if we want to live in heaven with him.

The book of Acts tells about our need to suffer many tribulations. For it says about Paul and his companions, **“And having preached the good news to that city, and having made considerable disciples, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:21-22). It is necessary for each of us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations. We must all drink the cup and be immersed the immersion of Jesus in our particular ways. And God determines such things for each of us individually.

Who will sit with him was not his decision

- **But to sit at my right hand and at my left hand is not mine to give, but to whom it has been prepared by my Father** (Matthew 20:23).

That is further evidence that Jesus is not equal with God the Father. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, having received all authority in heaven and upon the earth, but he is not God the Father himself, nor is he equal with him. The trinity theory is a false one. Nevertheless, as the Jews interpret every Old Testament prophecy about Jesus as being a prophecy about Israel, so also believers in the trinity theory interpret every passage that contradicts that theory as being about Jesus' life in the flesh. They call it his “incarnate self,” which expression is not found in the Bible, nor is the idea of it, because he has always had a body, whether on the earth or in heaven (see the first part of Revelation for a description of his heavenly body).

Paul spoke of how the eyes of the Jews are veiled so as not to see the truth, when he said, **“Having therefore such a hope we use great boldness, and are not as Moses. He put a veil over his face in order for the sons of Israel not to gaze on the end of the fading. But their minds were hardened, for to this day the same veil remains at the reading of the old testament, not being uncovered, which thing is abolished in Christ. But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:12-16).

Dear reader, if you are able to give up on that false trinity theory you will be amazed at how your eyes will be opened to see and understand truths you could not otherwise. Harden not your heart against the truth by clinging to that false theory. For it is an evil one. It is a great and unnecessary stumbling block to unbelievers. It makes it much more difficult for them to accept Jesus, because of that irrational, contradictory, and absurd theory. Forsaking belief in that false theory will not threaten your faith; it will strengthen it.

Having the honor of sitting beside Jesus in heaven will be given to some souls. But to whom it will be given nobody knows except God the Father himself. For what Jesus said suggests that even he did not then know, although he may know now.

The other apostles were indignant

- **And when the ten heard it, they were indignant about the two brothers. But having summoned them, Jesus said, Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them.**
- **But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your bondman. Just as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:24-28).**

The other ten apostles were naturally indignant that those two men wanted to rank themselves over the others. And so Jesus used the occasion to teach a lesson about rule and leadership among them. He used himself as an example of how they could become great and first among them. He was indeed an ideal example, because no other man ever served as a helper toward them as he had. He never did anything selfishly. And when he gave them commands, it was always for their benefit. And so it should also be among the leaders of every congregation of Christ.

Jesus is the head of the church. And there is no other authority in the church higher than the appointed elders of each congregation. However, their authority is limited to practical matters of their congregations, and never to overrule or supersede any doctrine or teaching in the word of God. Nor do they have authority over the personal lives of the members except to teach and encourage obedience to Christ.

And the way the elders are to exercise their authority is to follow the ways of Jesus. For example, they only have the right to admonish, rebuke, and command the withdrawal of fellowship, as forms of punishment for transgressions. And those things can only be done in accordance with the commands and examples of Christ and his apostles. Those few supernatural examples of more severe punishment by apostles that we read about were only for those early times before the New Testament was written.

Jesus heals two blind men

- **And when they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, having heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, Be merciful to us, Lord, thou son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, so that they would be quiet, but they cried out greater, saying, Be merciful to us, Lord, thou son of David.**
- **And having stood still, Jesus called them and said, What do ye want that I would do to you? They say to him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. And having felt compassion, Jesus touched their eyes, and straightaway they received their sight, and followed him (Matthew 20:29-34).**

Jesus sometimes refused requests, but there is no record that he ever refused to heal the sick and the handicapped who besought him. Indeed the Bible says, **“And they brought to him all those faring badly with various diseases, and gripped with pain, and being**

demon-possessed, and being lunatic, and paralyzed. And he healed them” (Matthew 4:24).

Remember however, there was one time when he initially refused to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman. But after her humble persistence he did heal her daughter. Jesus initially refused her request because she was a Gentile, and he said to her, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). Therefore, it would seem that even when we do not deserve it, if we humbly persist in our requests to God for something good he will eventually hearken to us. But remember this modern proverb: “Be careful what you ask for.”

The passage says Jesus healed them because he felt compassion. And our God still feels compassion toward the sick and the afflicted. People do not appreciate that fact about him because he allows so much suffering in the world. If you want to know why he allows it, then read the story of Job in the book by his name. God knows so much more about everything than we do that we will never be able to fully understand why he does things. Yet the Bible is filled with examples of how whatever he does is always for the benefit of those who love him.

Never forget this passage by Paul: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). Therefore, always love and trust our heavenly Father, even if you do not understand why he allows the terrible things of this world. Think thou not that he does not suffer with us? He indeed suffers with us because of the terrible things of the world. He allows them because he loves us.

Consider this passage: **“And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, namely us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from Gentiles”** (Romans 9:22-24).

This world is the only way he can test our souls to find who is worthy of becoming his sons for eternity in heaven with him. Therefore, have compassion in your heart for him because he is so compassionate for us, enduring the evils of this world with much longsuffering so that we can be rewarded with eternal glory when this life is over.

Jesus' public entrance on a donkey

- **And when they came near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, to the mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village opposite you, and straightaway ye will find a donkey tied, and a colt with it. Having loosed them, bring to me. And if any man says anything to you, ye will say, The Lord has need of them, and straightaway he will send them.**
- **Now all this came to pass, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King comes to thee, meek, and mounted upon a donkey, and a colt the foal of a pack animal. And the disciples having gone, and having done as Jesus**

commanded them, they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments over them. And he sat upon them (Matthew 21:1-7).

That prophecy about the donkey was from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. It says, **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy king comes to thee. He is just, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon a donkey, even upon a colt the foal of a donkey”** (Zechariah 9:9).

Kings of the world make their grand entrances sitting loftily on noble steeds, not on lowly donkeys, which are beasts of burden used by the common people. Jesus is the King of kings, yet he chose to make his grand entrance into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey.

Remember, Jesus said to the people about himself: **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). Jesus and God his Father have the ultimate power over all things. Yet Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. And if we want to be faithful disciples of him, then we too must be meek and lowly in heart. And we must show it in our lives.

However, that does not mean we should shirk from our battle against sin and wickedness. Remember what David said about Jehovah: **“With the merciful thou will show thyself merciful. With the perfect man thou will show thyself perfect. With the pure thou will show thyself pure. And with the perverse thou will show thyself contrary. And the afflicted people thou will save, but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou may bring them down”** (Second Samuel 22:26-28).

Regarding the colt, perhaps Jesus sat sidesaddle with his feet resting upon the colt. Much has been written about how he could have sat on both of them. If such trivial questions cause you to doubt the word of God, then you are unworthy of it.

Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem

- **And the great multitude spread their garments on the road, and others cut down branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. And the multitudes who went ahead and those who followed, cried out, saying, Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!**
- **And when he entered into Jerusalem, all the city was shaken, saying, Who is this? And the multitudes said, This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee** (Matthew 21:8-11).

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times after he began his ministry. But this was his grand entrance as the son of David, the Christ, the promised Messiah. And the multitudes honored him that way, shouting out in praise to him. They even spread things on the road, including their own garments, as a sign of honor to him, similar to what we do in modern times with what we call the red carpet treatment.

The people of Jerusalem were naturally aroused by that parade for him, and they asked who the man was. Rather than saying he was the Messiah, they simply said he was Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. They had praised him on the road as the son of David. Why then did they not announce him that way in the city? It is probably because

the city had already heard them praising him that way. And they wanted to know who the man was that the multitudes proclaimed was the son of David.

Jesus was called the son of David because he was fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the seed of David. The Messiah was going to be the king that God said would reign over an eternal kingdom. Here is what Jehovah said to David about that king and his kingdom: **“And it shall come to pass, when thy days are fulfilled that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will set up thy seed after thee, who shall be of thy sons. And I will establish his kingdom.**

“He shall build for me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. And I will not take my loving kindness away from him as I took it from him who was before thee [king Saul]. But I will settle him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever” (First Chronicles 17:11-14). Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy, and the house of God that he built is the church.

Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means “save now.” It is used in psalm 118: **“Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah. O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he who comes in the name of Jehovah. We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah”** (Psalm 118:25-26).

Cleansing the temple of robbers

- **And Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out all those who sold and bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold the doves. And he says to them, It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer, but ye made it a den of robbers** (Matthew 21:12-13).

Jesus was physically aggressive to those “robbers” because they were in the temple of God. They no doubt had permission to be there from the rulers of the Jews, but they were charging exorbitant prices, making them robbers. They could make excessive charges because many visiting Jews, especially those who lived in foreign countries, needed to exchange their money so they could make the required animal sacrifices.

Here is the law about using money that way: **“Thou shall surely tithe all the increase of thy seed; that which comes forth from the field year by year. And thou shall eat before Jehovah thy God, in the place which he shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, the tithe of thy grain, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herd and of thy flock, that thou may learn to fear Jehovah thy God always.**

“And if the way is too long for thee, so that thou are not able to carry it, because the place is too far from thee, which Jehovah thy God shall choose to set his name there when Jehovah thy God shall bless thee, then thou shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in thy hand, and shall go to the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose.

“And thou shall bestow the money for whatever thy soul desires, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever thy soul asks of thee. And thou shall eat there before Jehovah thy God, and thou shall rejoice, thou and thy

household. And the Levite who is within thy gates, thou shall not forsake him, for he has no portion nor inheritance with thee” (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

The biography of Jesus by John tells of an earlier time when Jesus had cast out those merchants (see John 2:14-16). Since both of them occurred at the time of the Passover feast, perhaps those merchants were only there during that annual celebration. Jesus must have cast them out each time he went, but they probably returned after he departed Jerusalem. However, there are other theories attempting to explain those two reports.

Here is the passage from Isaiah about the temple being a house of prayer: **“Also the foreigners who join themselves to Jehovah, to minister to him, and to love the name of Jehovah, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant, even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).**

The chief priests and scholars became indignant

- **And the lame and the blind came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scholars saw the wonderful things that he did, and the boys crying out in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant, and said to him, Do thou hear what these are saying? And Jesus says to them, Yes! Did ye never read, Out of the mouth of children and those who suckle thou have perfected praise? (Matthew 21:14-16).**

The chief priests and the scholars could not believe Jesus was the Messiah, the son of David. Nevertheless, they were afraid to rebuke the people for praising him that way. Therefore, they implied Jesus should reprove them. But he rebuffed their suggestion, and quoted a scripture in support of what they were doing.

That scripture is from the Psalms, and it says, **“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou have perfected praise, because of thine adversaries, that thou might still the enemy and the avenger” (Psalm 8:2).** Jesus often quoted scripture to counter those who were opposing him. Remember, that is how he responded to the three temptations of the devil in the wilderness. That is one more reason we should continually study the Bible. For the word of God is our best defense against those who would condemn us.

A lesson about the power of faith

- **And having left them behind, he went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. Now early while returning to the city, he was hungry. And having seen a fig tree, one on the way, he came to it, and found nothing on it, except leaves only. And he says to it, Let fruit no longer be produced from thee into the age. And immediately the fig tree dried out.**
- **And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree dry out immediately? Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, if ye have faith,**

and doubt not, ye will not only do that of the fig tree, but even if ye may say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it will happen. And all things, as many as ye may ask in prayer, believing, ye will receive (Matthew 21:17-22).

Jesus did not spend the nights in Jerusalem. He lodged in Bethany, which was a village about two miles from Jerusalem. It is interesting that there is no record Jesus ever lodged in Jerusalem after he began his ministry. Matthew later mentions Jesus lodging in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany (see Matthew 26:6). And he may also have lodged in that town with Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, because they lived there. (They are mentioned in the biographies by Luke and John.) Bethany is also the place where Jesus ascended into heaven in the sight of his disciples after his resurrection (see Luke 24:50-51).

In the above passage Jesus taught that lesson on faith after his apostles marveled about how quickly a fig tree he had cursed withered. Jesus told them they would receive whatever they asked in prayer if they believed. Remember, however, whatever we ask in prayer must be according to his will. And that means asking for things that are good and right and just.

And about having things cast into the sea, consider this prophecy of Ezekiel: **“Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken, the gate of the peoples. She has turned around to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste. Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers.**

“I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken it, says the lord Jehovah. And she shall become a spoil to the nations, and her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword. And they shall know that I am Jehovah” (Ezekiel 26:2-6).

In the fifth century B.C. the Babylonians had attacked and destroyed the city of Tyre. However, its citizens had escaped to an island not far offshore from the city and rebuilt there. Much later, in the third century B.C. Alexander the Macedonian defeated that new city by commanding his army to use the rubble of the old city to make a causeway across to the island. Therefore, the place of the old city was scraped clean and made a bare rock, as Jehovah had prophesied to Ezekiel. God can do anything, but he does them in his own time and way.

Answering a question with a question

- **And when he came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him while he taught, saying, By what authority do thou these things? And who gave thee this authority? And having answered, Jesus said to them, I also will ask you one word, which if ye tell me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The immersion of John, from where was it, from heaven or from men?**

- **And they deliberated with themselves, saying, If we should say, From heaven, he will say to us, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we should say, From men, we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet. And having answered Jesus, they said, We know not. He said to them, And neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things (Matthew 21:23-27).**

The chief priests and the elders were no doubt angry that Jesus had cast out the merchants from the temple. I suspect they were receiving payments from the merchants for that privilege. Moreover, Jesus challenged their authority to allow those merchants to be there by casting them out.

When the chief priests and the elders demanded to know by what authority Jesus did those things, and who gave it to him, he asked them a question. After hearing the question, they knew that whatever answer they gave would have condemned them. Therefore, they refused to answer. That is a good lesson for us. We are not obligated to answer every question someone asks of us, especially if they will not answer our questions. That was not the only time Jesus would not give to those who asked him. We have the freedom to use our discretion about how we respond to people, especially when they challenge us. For the teachings of Jesus are principles of righteousness, not laws for a new legal system.

Better to repent and obey

- **But what does it seem to you? A man had two children. And having come to the first, he said, Child, go work today in my vineyard. And having answered, he said, I do not want to, but having repented later, he went. And having come to the second, he said likewise. And having answered, he said, I, sir, and did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father? They say to him, The first.**
- **Jesus says to them, Truly I say to you, that the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in a way of righteousness, and ye did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him. And having seen it, ye did not repent afterward to believe him (Matthew 21:28-32).**

That was one of many parables Jesus told against the leaders of the Jews. They piously proclaimed that they wanted to obey God, but Jesus knew what hypocrites they were. Therefore, he used that parable to show how pious claims of obedience were sometimes empty words.

And he used the hated tax collectors and the disdained harlots to show how even they would enter into the kingdom of God before the chief priests and the elders would. That was a severe rebuke to them. But Jesus proved what he said with the example of the teachings of John the immerser, which they had rejected even after seeing how John brought tax collectors and harlots to repentance. The leaders of the Jews were proud and self-righteous hypocrites, and Jesus exposed them. However, instead of those leaders repenting they hated and persecuted him.

The parable of the leased vineyard

- **Hear ye another parable. There was a certain man who was a house-ruler, who planted a vineyard, and placed a hedge around it, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and leased it to farmers, and went on a journey.**
- **And when the time of the fruits approached, he sent his bondmen to the farmers to receive his fruits. And the farmers having taken his bondmen, they beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other bondmen more than the first, and they did to them in like manner.**
- **But finally he sent to them his son, saying, They will be made ashamed by my son. But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and possess his inheritance. And having seized him, they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him (Matthew 21:33-39).**

In that parable the house-ruler symbolizes God; the vineyard symbolizes the land of Israel; the farmers symbolize the Israelites; the fruits symbolize their productive obedience to him; and the son of the house-ruler is Jesus Christ. Through that parable Jesus prophesied how they would reject and kill him because they wanted to live as they pleased and not how God wanted them to live.

In another sense however, that parable could be generalized to say something about the devil and his disciples. Perhaps what they want is to possess the world as their own. And destroying the Son of God would mean they could keep it. For who else could God give the world to if his Son failed? Therefore, the devil and his disciples did everything they could to cause Jesus to sin so that the kingdom of God in the world would fail. Which would mean the kingdom of the devil would prevail.

The devil and his disciples want us to fail (spiritually) because Jesus lives in us. For Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him”** (Romans 8:9). Indeed, Paul said to the Ephesians, **“... we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

Justice in the end

- **When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers? They say to him, Evil men, he will miserably destroy them, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will render him the fruits in their seasons (Matthew 21:40-41).**

The record of that response in Mark reads this way: **“What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the farmers, and will give the vineyard to others”** (Mark 12:9-11). And in Luke it reads this way: **“What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. And having heard it, they said, May it not happen!”** (Luke 20:15-16). Both Mark and Luke say that Jesus answered his own question but Matthew gives the

answer of the rulers, both of which answers condemned the farmers. The record in Luke also says that the rulers opposed Jesus' answer.

I offer the following explanation of those differences. Putting the two passages together, the story probably went something like this:

What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? They say to him, Evil men, he will miserably destroy them, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus agreed, and said to them, He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. But the Jews, having heard it and realizing it applied to them, they said, May it not happen!

It was only after the Jews realized the parable was against them that they rejected the judgment of destruction.

Luke merely abbreviated the exchange to present only how the lesson applied to those Jewish rulers and how they refused it. Consequently, he omitted what the rulers said about the farmers in the parable. He omitted it because it was not needed. Their response merely showed how they agreed with the justice of condemning those farmers before they realized the parable applied to them.

Remember, the Bible is a highly concise and condensed book. Therefore, be not concerned if details are omitted here and there in various passages. God has provided in his holy book what is sufficient for us, sufficient to give us the knowledge of him and his will for us that we need.

The stone that was rejected

- **Jesus says to them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone that those who build rejected, this came to be in the head of the corner. This happened from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes? (Matthew 21:42).**

Those rulers did not realize the father and the son in that parable referred to God and Christ. And so Jesus tried to make it clear by rebuking them, asking if they never read the scripture about the stone rejected by those who build. That stone symbolizes Jesus Christ, and those who build symbolize the rulers of the Jews.

By means of the parable Jesus was warning those corrupt rulers that God will take vengeance against them and will find others who will serve him in righteousness. And after the parable he reminded them of the psalm about how the stone that was rejected became the headstone: **"The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner"** (Psalm 118:22). Jesus told how such things happen from the Lord, which things greatly impress us. They are marvelous in our eyes because of his wonderful justice, making right what men make wrong.

The stone and falling

- **Because of this I say to you, that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing the fruits of it. And he who falls on this stone will be shattered, but on whomever it may fall, it will grind him to dust (Matthew 21:43-44).**

In that passage Jesus applied the parable about the farmers directly to them. The Jews were the chosen people of God, but he was going to give his kingdom of the heavens to another nation that would serve him in righteousness. And that nation is the spiritual nation called the kingdom of the heavens, which on the earth is the church. Jesus is the headstone of that nation, and he is eventually going to totally crush all of his enemies.

The Old Testament tells how the prophet Daniel in Babylon revealed to king Nebuchadnezzar a mysterious dream that the king had. His dream foretold how a mighty kingdom would break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, and would stand forever.

Here is that story: **“Daniel answered before the king, and said, The secret which the king has demanded, neither wise men, enchanters, magicians, nor soothsayers, can show to the king, but there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets. And he has made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.**

“Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these: As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter. And he who reveals secrets has made known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living man, but to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that thou may know the thoughts of thy heart.

“Thou, O king, saw, and, behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty, and whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee, and the appearance of it was fearful. As for this image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron, and part of clay.

“Thou looked until a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, was broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

“This is the dream, and we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. Thou, O king, are a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory. And wherever the sons of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, he has given into thy hand, and has made thee to rule over them all. Thou are the head of gold.

“And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things. And as iron that crushes all these, it shall break in pieces and crush. And whereas thou saw the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom.

“But there shall be of the strength of the iron in it, inasmuch as thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cling one to another, even as iron does not mix with clay.

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty of it be left to another people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as thou saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure” (Daniel 2:27-45).

The first kingdom Daniel mentioned was the Babylonian empire; the second was the Persian empire; the third was the Macedonian (Greek) empire of Alexander; and the fourth was the Roman empire. The last kingdom is the kingdom of God, the church. Other kingdoms rise and fall, but at the end of the world they will all be broken and consumed, ground into dust by the power of the Son of God. But the kingdom of God will never be destroyed; it will stand forever. And we will stand with it, if we remain faithful until the end.

Wanting to seize Jesus

- **And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he spoke about them. And when they sought to seize him, they feared the multitudes, because they held him as a prophet (Matthew 21:45-46).**

The chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus immediately, but they were afraid, afraid of the multitudes who consider him to be a prophet. They wanted to arrest him immediately because they knew he spoke the parable against them. That parable exposed them as evil men who deserved being rejected by God. However, instead of repenting, they hated Jesus and wanted to destroy him.

The parable about a king and his son's wedding

- **And having responded, Jesus again spoke to them in parables, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a king who made a wedding for his son. And he sent forth his bondmen to call those who were invited to the wedding festivities, and they did not want to come. Again he sent forth other bondmen, saying, Speak to those who were invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings have been killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding festivities.**
- **But having disregarded, they departed, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, and the others having seized his bondmen, abused and killed them. But having heard that, the king was angry, and having sent forth his armies, he destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.**
- **Then he says to his bondmen, The wedding is indeed ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go ye therefore to the crossings of the ways, and as many as ye may find, call to the wedding festivities. And those bondmen having departed into the roads, they gathered together all, as many as**

they found, both bad and good. And the wedding was filled with those who were dining (Matthew 22:1-10).

That was another parable against the religious leaders of the Jews. He was not afraid of them even though they wanted to seize him. Instead, he continued to rebuke them with another parable. The king symbolizes God; the wedding symbolizes the church, which is the kingdom of the heavens on the earth; those who were invited symbolize the population of the Jews and their leaders; the bondmen symbolize the apostles and other disciples of Christ; the armies of the king symbolize the Roman army; and those in the roads symbolize the common people of the world.

That was also a prophetic parable. For the great majority of the Jews and their leaders rejected the church and persecuted its evangelists. Nevertheless, the church grew in number, especially with the Gentiles. The book of Acts describes those things. Then forty years after Jesus began his ministry the Roman army came and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and they scattered the small remnant of the Jews away from their country.

Not having a wedding garment

- **But when the king came in to see those who were dining, he saw there a man who was not clothed with a wedding garment. And he says to him, Friend, how did thou come in here not having a wedding garment? But he was speechless. Then the king said to the helpers, After binding him hands and feet, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few chosen** (Matthew 22:11-14).

That part of the parable refers to those who accept the invitation to become a disciple of Christ, but who fail to complete its requirements. Among the first of those requirements are genuinely repenting of sins and being immersed in water for the remission of them. The failure of millions of believers to properly immerse for their salvation that way is seen everywhere.

Many of them substitute sprinkling or pouring for immersion. Or they consider any action with water at all to be unnecessary, claiming all they need is faith. They risk being cast into the outer darkness in the afterlife because they were not properly prepared. Notice carefully the last words of that parable: **“For many are called, but few chosen.”** Dear reader, do not make light of anything that Jesus commanded, lest you be among the many called but not chosen.

Trying to trap Jesus in his talk

- **Then the Pharisees having departed, they took counsel how they might trap him in his talk. And they send out their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that thou are true, and teach the way of God in truth, and it is not a concern to thee about a man, for thou look not to the personage of men. Tell us therefore, what does it seem to thee? Is it permitted to give tribute to Caesar or not?**

- **But Jesus having known their wickedness, said, Why do ye tempt me, ye hypocrites? Exhibit to me the tribute money. And they brought to him a denarius. And he says to them, Whose is this image and inscription? They say to him, Caesar's. Then he says to them, Therefore, render the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God. And when they heard it, they marveled. And having left him, they departed (Matthew 22:15-22).**

That event is a classic example of how the devil and his disciples strive to cause righteous men to say something they can use against them. First they flattered him, about which Solomon said, **“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps”** (Proverbs 29:5).

Then they asked him a question they thought would trap him. For if he said to pay the tribute money, that would have indicated he supported the Roman occupation of Israel and the requirement to pay them tribute, which was hated by the people. And if he said not to pay it, then he could be charged with teaching rebellion against the Romans. Indeed, the book of Luke says they questioned him that way **“in order to deliver him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor”** (Luke 20:20). That governor was the representative of Rome.

Jesus easily defeated their crafty design against him, and he used the occasion to teach a lesson about giving the things of God to God. And no doubt the common people, even though they hated the tribute, rejoiced when they saw the skillful way he turned that crafty question against those hypocrites who asked it. The record says that even those enemies marveled at his answer. Being so awed at his answer they had nothing more they could say, and so they departed.

Notice how the passage says the Pharisees sent out their disciples to him with the Herodians. The Pharisees claimed to be the most righteous of the Jews. Yet they were in league with the wicked Herodians. It is a sign of spiritual degeneracy when the religious leaders of the people cooperate with the most wicked men and seek their help. And the Herodians were indeed wicked men. For both of the kings who were named Herod that are mentioned in the Bible were very wicked and ruthless men.

Sadducees also ask Jesus a question

- **On that day Sadducees came to him, those who claim to be no resurrection. And they questioned him, saying, Teacher, Moses said, If some man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed to his brother.**
- **Now there were with us seven brothers. And the first having married perished. And having no seed left his wife to his brother. Likewise also the second, and the third, until the seventh. And last of all, the woman also died. In the resurrection therefore, which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her (Matthew 22:23-28).**

Not much is known about the Sadducees, except they were judged with the Pharisees as men deserving of rebuke. The Sadducees seem to have been a kind of minority political

sect of a higher class than the Pharisees. For the book of Acts says the high priest was of the sect of the Sadducees (see Acts 5:17). Also the Bible mentions the Pharisees seven times more often than the Sadducees. The Sadducees apparently believed in God, but not the personal one of the Bible record. For the book of acts says about them, “... **Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all**” (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees also came to Jesus with what they thought was a question he could not answer. Here is the law about propagating a brother's name: **“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies, and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be, that the firstborn who she bears shall succeed in the name of his brother who is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel”** (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

However, that practice was older than the law of Moses. The first reference in the Bible to that practice was with one of the sons of Judah. Judah was one of the twelve sons of Israel, and he lived centuries before Moses. Here is what the Bible says about it: **“And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah killed him. And Judah said to Onan, Go in to thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to thy brother”** (Genesis 38:6-8).

No marriage in heaven

- **But having answered, Jesus said to them, Ye are led astray, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as agents of God in heaven.**
- **But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not God of the dead, but of the living** (Matthew 22:29-32).

Jesus rebuked the Sadducees by saying they were led astray, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. Then he explained the difference of our existence on the earth compared with how it is in heaven. By those words he revealed there will be no female form there. We who are worthy to be there, both men and women, will all be masculine, sons of God. The female form is for this world only. That is why I titled one of my books *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

After revealing that information he quoted a scripture that implied an afterlife as evidence of the resurrection of the dead. The passage he quoted was about the first time Jehovah appeared to Moses: **“And the agent of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.**

“And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Do

not draw near here. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place on which thou stand is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:2-6).

The fact that Jesus used the scriptures to make inferences justifies our using the scriptures in logical ways to make conclusions that are not specifically stated, such as there being no female form in heaven. Of course, great caution should always be used when interpreting the Bible that way, because it is subject to misuse. Nevertheless, it can be a powerful and very useful way to further our knowledge and understanding.

It should be noted that the Old Testament has no direct teachings about the resurrection of the dead. That is why it was a controversial idea among the Jews. Perhaps God reserved that wonderful knowledge for the time of Christ so that it could be a part of his good news of our salvation.

The great commandment of the law

- **But the Pharisees, having heard that he silenced the Sadducees, they came together in the same place. And one of them, a lawyer, questioned, trying him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?**
- **And Jesus said to him, Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the first and great commandment** (Matthew 22:33-38).

The great commandment that Jesus quoted is found in the book of Deuteronomy: **“Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah. And thou shall love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”** (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). By obeying that commandment to love Jehovah our God completely we will obey all of his other commandments.

Loving God completely causes us to obey his commandments. And our obedience proves our love for him. Consider what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“He who has my commandments, and keeps them, that man it is who loves me”** (John 14:21). The apostle John also wrote later about that, when he said, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man”** (First John 2:3-4).

Notice how Jesus did not use God’s name Jehovah when he quoted that scripture. Instead, he used the descriptive word Lord. (The original Greek had no lower case letters. It is simply conventional in translations to capitalize the first letter in that word when it applies to God.)

The reason Jesus did not speak God’s name Jehovah is because of the ridiculous fanaticism of the Jews. According to their thinking, the reason they outlawed uttering God’s name was to avoid violating the third of the ten commandments: **“Thou shall not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain”** (Exodus 20:7). Thus, they made it a crime to utter his name.

Jesus could have justifiably condemned that law, but he simply complied with it. The reason was no doubt to be an example for us about such things. For example, if a country made a law requiring obedience to the sabbath day as given in the ten commandments, we should comply, even though as Christians we are not bound to such things. We cannot oppose any of the laws of the land simply because we are not under law with God, as Paul said, **“For ye are not under law, but under grace”** (Romans 6:14). It is only those laws that are against the commands of God that we must disobey.

The second great commandment

- **And the second is like it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself** (Matthew 22:39).

That commandment is found in the book of Leviticus: **“Thou shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of thy people, but thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. I am Jehovah”** (Leviticus 19:18).

In Luke’s biography of Jesus, when Jesus quoted those two commandments to a lawyer who had asked him how to inherit eternal life, the record says, **“But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?”** (Luke 10:29). Jesus then told the story of how a Samaritan helped a man who had been injured by bandits. Jesus told that story (1) in answer to the question who is our neighbor, and (2) to illustrate what it means to love our neighbor as ourself.

Remember however, the command to love our neighbor as ourself is not a rigid legalism, because as disciples of Christ we are not under a legal system with God. He wants us, who love his truth and righteousness, to use our wisdom and good judgment when we apply his commandments. For example, we are obviously not to love our neighbor’s wife exactly as we love our own wife. Nor should we love his children exactly as much as we love our own children. There is never any substitute for using wisdom and good judgment when applying God’s commandments for us.

Moreover, some of our neighbors may not be worthy of any of our love. Remember, for example, Jesus also said this: **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turned back may lacerate you”** (Matthew 7:6). Of course, when a man repents and turns from acting like a dog or a swine, then we can show appropriate love for him.

All the law and the prophets

- **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets** (Matthew 22:40).

Those two commandments summarize the teachings about righteousness in the Old Testament (the law and the prophets). Without obedience to those two commandments all the rest would be useless. For all the rest are supported by those two commandments.

The text says the lawyer was trying Jesus with that question. According to Mark’s record of that dialogue, the lawyer was also a scholar. And he was pleased with Jesus’ response, agreeing with him: **“Well, teacher. Thou spoke in truth that he is one, and there is no**

other but he. And to love him from the whole heart, and from the whole understanding, and from the whole soul, and from the whole strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:32-33).

Jesus interrogates the Pharisees

- **Now the Pharisees having been gathered together, Jesus interrogated them, saying, What does it seem to you about the Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him, Of David. He says to them, How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet? If David therefore calls him Lord, how is he his son?**
- **And no man was able to answer him a word, nor did any man from that day dare to question him any more (Matthew 22:41-46).**

Before David sinned against Uriah, God had promised David he would make of him a never ending dynasty. Therefore, the Jews said the Christ (the Messiah, the anointed one) would be a son (a descendant) of David. However, Jesus gave them a riddle about it they could not answer. The riddle involved this passage from the Psalms: **“Jehovah says to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool”** (Psalm 110:1). How could David call his son “my Lord?” The answer is that the Christ was a son of David in his flesh, but he was his Lord in his spirit.

This perverted generation of Americans would have no problem with a father calling his son “lord.” Indeed, it is very common for them to proclaim the children of a family to be wiser and more righteous than their fathers. And they virtually always have their fathers bow down and kneel before them.

Nevertheless, in the sight of God a father doing such things as calling his son “lord” is a great perversion. One of the ten commandment says, **“Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee”** (Exodus 20:12). It is perverse to say that fathers and mothers should honor their children.

Every time his opponents challenged Jesus with a question, he turned it against them. That humbled them. But instead of being grateful, they quit trying. That is one reason why Jesus said, **“Truly I say to you, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it”** (Mark 10:15). Children are humble and eager to learn.

Teaching versus doing

- **Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and difficult to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they do not want to move them with their finger (Matthew 23:1-4).**

When Jesus said those men sat on Moses' seat, he was speaking about how they had the authority and responsibility to maintain and enforce the law. Therefore, the people should obey them. However, the scholars and the Pharisees were great hypocrites, who themselves created many ways to bypass obeying the requirements of the law for themselves. Yet they yoked the people with rigid interpretations of the law, and they added many legalisms to increase their requirements. It is very common among sinful rulers to keep finding ways to gain more control over the people, while at the same time exempting themselves.

Being glorified by men

- **But all their works they do in order to be seen by men. And they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the hems of their garments** (Matthew 23:5).

Here is the command about hems: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel, and bid them that they make for them hems in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the hem of each border a cord of blue.**

“And it shall be to you for a hem, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Jehovah, and do them, and that ye not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to play the harlot, that ye may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am Jehovah your God” (Numbers 15:37-41).

Those blue hems served as a constant visual reminder to the people to obey God's commandments. They also reminded them that they belonged to Jehovah, serving as a mark of distinction contrasting them from Gentiles. Remember, God wanted them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Exodus 19:6). However, as with most of the laws of Moses, the Jews have now ignored that command and have invented things like prayer shawls instead. Moses said nothing about prayer shawls.

Those scholars and Pharisees wanted to make themselves distinct from other Jews. They wanted to appear more pious so people would honor them. Inventing phylacteries was another way they could do it. Phylacteries are leather boxes containing passages of the law on little scrolls and worn on their arms and foreheads. (Jews call those boxes tefillin.)

That practice was another of the many traditions the Jews had multiplied. It is based upon this law of Moses: **“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart. And thou shall teach them diligently to thy sons, and shall talk of them when thou sit in thy house, and when thou walk by the way, and when thou lie down, and when thou rise up.**

“And thou shall bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shall write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

As with many of the laws of Moses it was stated more than once. Here is an earlier passage about that command: **“And it shall be for a sign to thee upon thy hand, and for a**

memorial between thine eyes, that the law of Jehovah may be in thy mouth, for with a strong hand has Jehovah brought thee out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:9).

That law included both things literal and things figurative. It is obvious the laws could not literally be upon their hearts. Nor could they be in their mouths. Binding them upon their hands and making them frontlets between their eyes was also figurative. For there is no evidence that Jesus or his apostles ever wore such things on their bodies. And Jesus obeyed all of the laws of Moses.

The important things were the principles of the law, which meant they were to always be conscious of God’s commandments by speaking about them often and making them visibly available. The old practice in America of having Bibles everywhere is a way of fulfilling that principle. Also in the past, Americans often spent time discussing the teachings of the Bible. Indeed, Americans were known as the people of the Bible.

The Jews focused on outward appearance of obedience. Hence, they invented the phylacteries. And they added many other requirements about them. The internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says there were ten specific requirements for the phylacteries, although none of such things are in the law of Moses:

The scroll must be written with ink.

The scrolls must be made of parchment.

The boxes and their stitches must be perfectly square.

On the right and left sides of the head-tefillin the letter shin must be embossed.

The scrolls must be wrapped in a strip of cloth.

The scrolls should be bound with kosher animal hair.

The stitching must be done with sinew of a kosher animal.

A “passageway” must be made for the strap to pass through.

The straps must be black.

The straps should be knotted in the form of the [Hebrew] letter dalet.

The Jews are so blinded by their worship of legalism that they fail to understand the foundation principles supporting God’s laws. Consider this example: **“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up testing him, and saying, Teacher, having done what, would I inherit eternal life? And he said to him, What is written in the law? How read thou?”**

“And having answered, he said, Thou shall love the Lord thy God from thy whole heart, and from thy whole soul, and from thy whole strength, and from thy whole mind, and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said to him, Thou answered correctly. Do this and thou will live. But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-29).

Jesus did not answer the man about who is our neighbor with some legal definition. Instead he gave him an example with what we call the parable of the good Samaritan. That parable was an example of the principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The Jews were (and continue to be) extreme legalists, and they focused upon outward appearance, like the phylacteries (and skullcaps they later invented), but they violated the more important commandments. For example, Jesus said they **“omitted the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy and faith”** (Matthew 23:23).

Loving to be first

- **And they love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be designated by men, Rabbi, Rabbi** (Matthew 23:6-7).

Such behavior is commonly done by many men throughout the world. They act and dress in ways to make others think highly of them. For they love to be praised and exalted among men. A classic example of such men are the rulers of the Roman Catholic Church. They wear very ornate and ostentatious apparel in their public appearances, and they expect everyone to address them with lofty titles and to bow down to them.

Many Protestants also reverse the collars of their shirts to make them appear distinct from other believers. And they expect people to call them Reverend, a title that belongs to God only. For the psalmist said, **“He has sent redemption to his people. He has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and reverend is his name”** (Psalm 111:9).

Have no special titles among us

- **But be ye not designated Rabbi, for one is your leader, the Christ, and ye are all brothers. And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your Father, he in the heavens. And be ye not designated leaders, for one is your leader, the Christ** (Matthew 23:8-10).

Jesus condemned the use of titles among us. We are not to designate any fellow Christian as Rabbi, father, or leader. And that certainly includes titles such as Reverend and Pastor. Jesus said that among ourselves there are to be no special titles, because we **“are all brothers.”** Sinful men ignore that command, and insist on being referred to as Reverend, Father, and Pastor. Indeed, they have even created class separations, elevating themselves into what they call the clergy versus the laity. As Jesus said, they love to be designated by men with special titles and be exalted above them. Jesus said it must not be that way among us.

Nevertheless remember, among the world we are obligated to respect the different ranks among men. Moreover, we are certainly allowed to address them with their special titles, such as Doctor, Commander, or Professor. And we are no doubt allowed do that with fellow Christians, but only while they are in that secular role.

As Jesus said, among ourselves there are to be no special titles, because we are all brothers. Moreover, there are some titles that belong to God only. Titles such as Reverend, Father, and Your Holiness must never be used to address men of any kind, even if their laws require it.

Of course, we are certainly allowed to refer to the man who begot us as our father. And we are allowed to apply such words as father, rabbi, and leader to other men in a descriptive sense. However, we are not allowed to use such words as a title among ourselves. For example, we can refer to our elders as our leaders, but never as titles, such as Elder Jones or Leader Smith.

But remember, we always need to understand the principles of what Jesus commands, and not obey them in a blind legalistic sense. The apostle Paul certainly knew about the restric-

tion Jesus gave about calling any of us Father. Yet he referred to himself as the father of his Corinthian brothers.

For he said to them, **“I do not write these things shaming you, but I warn you as my beloved children. For though ye have countless instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus I begot you through the good news. I beseech you therefore, become followers of me”** (First Corinthians 4:14-16). He was their spiritual father in a descriptive sense, but he was never called Father Paul. Nor was he ever called Reverent Paul or even Pastor Paul, much less grand titles like Your Holiness.

What makes us greater

- **But the greater of you will be your helper. And he who will exalt himself will be made low, and he who will make himself low will be exalted** (Matthew 23:11-12).

As followers of Christ we are to be a unique people in many ways, including our humbleness. For even our leaders are to consider themselves to be our helpers. Men who exalt themselves in this life are going to be made low in the next one. While men who make themselves low in this world will be exalted in heaven.

Making ourselves low means living a humble life of service to others. How each man does that is for him to decide; that is part of our liberty in Christ. Nevertheless, being a helper of each other in some kind of way should be one of our goals. Jesus said that is what makes us greater among ourselves, not loft titles or higher ranks, which are necessary devices for the world.

Woe for hypocrisy and opposition to the kingdom

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye close up the kingdom of the heavens ahead of men. For ye enter not in, nor do ye allow those who are entering to enter in** (Matthew 23:13).

Jesus here begins to severely rebuke the scholars and Pharisees. He uttered eight specific woes against them. A woe is a type of curse, a calling for evils against those it is invoked against. That word is used about a hundred times in the Bible. Isaiah used it sixteen times against those who do evil. Here are two examples: **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”** (Isaiah 5:20-21).

Hypocrisy was one of the specific sins that Jesus most frequently condemned. And the scholars and the Pharisees were among the most guilty of it. He called them hypocrites many times.

Jesus here condemns them for not entering the kingdom of the heavens themselves or allowing others to enter in. They did not allow others to enter in, not forceably, but by the threat of being religiously rejected. They did not allow others to enter into the kingdom, because they threatened to cast them out of the synagogues if they did. For example, in John’s biography of Jesus, John said, **“... the Jews had agreed already, that if any man**

confessed him as Christ, he should become excommunicated from the synagogue” (John 9:22).

Woe for hypocrisy and devouring widow's houses

- **But woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye devour widows' houses, and praying long in pretence. Because of this ye will receive greater condemnation** (Matthew 23:14).

Devouring widow's houses was just an example of their predatory behavior toward the weak and lowly. And such things are very common among wicked men. They love to use deceit and trickery to swindle unsuspecting people, especially the weak and naive. And they put on a mask of piety to make their evil work easier. Therefore, Jesus said they would receive the greater condemnation, which refers to their greater punishment in hell.

Job spoke about how he helped the victims of such men before he was so greatly afflicted by the devil. Here are some of the things Job said when he was defending himself against the false charges that were being made against him: **“I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the case of him whom I did not know. And I broke the jaws of the unrighteous, and plucked the prey out of his teeth”** (Job 29:16-17).

The scholars and the Pharisees that Jesus cursed were the same kind of men Job had opposed. They devoured widows' houses with their jaws and their teeth. Yet all the while making long prayers to give the impression of being righteousness. Their jaws and teeth symbolize things like political, legal, and financial power.

Woe for hypocrisy and for corrupting proselytes

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye encompass the sea and the land to make one proselyte, and when it happens, ye make him twice more a son of hell than yourselves** (Matthew 23:15).

Those hypocrites would go to great lengths to convert a Gentile to their religion. But the men they converted would then become even more vicious hypocrites. The terribleness of hell is not just because it is a fiery furnace. It is the place filled with the most evil souls.

A son of something is an offspring of it. And a son of hell is an offspring of hell. And since hell is the place filled with the most evil souls, then an offspring of hell symbolizes an evil soul. James also used the word hell in a figurative way, when he said, **“And the tongue is a fire, the world of unrighteousness. Thus, the tongue is made to lead among our body-parts, defiling the whole body, and setting the cycle of nature on fire, and being set on fire by hell”** (James 3:6).

Not only did those evil scholars and Pharisees make their proselytes evil, they made them twice as evil as they themselves were.

Woe for being blind guides

- **Woe to you, ye blind guides, who say, Whoever may swear by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever may swear by the gold of the temple, he is obli-**

gated. Ye foolish and blind men, for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? And, Whoever may swear by the altar, it is nothing, but whoever may swear by the gift upon it, he is obligated.

- **Ye foolish and blind men, for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? He therefore who swears by the altar, swears by it, and by all things on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it (Matthew 23:16-22).**

What Jesus was condemning with those words is how those scholars and Pharisees arbitrarily decided upon what basis an oath was binding. Jesus said that an oath is binding regardless of how it is done. And modern Jews continue to choose for themselves which of God's commands to obey and which to ignore.

Also many modern leaders of believers in Christ follow the ways of those blind scholars and Pharisees who determined which oaths were binding and which were not. It is very common for men to pick and choose which commands of Christ to obey and which to ignore, and to say which are essential and which are not. And perhaps the most common of the commands that are denied in these modern times is the necessity of believers to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins.

Woe for hypocrisy and perverting the law

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye tithe mint and the anise and the cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy and faith. These things must be done, and not neglecting those things. Ye blind guides, who strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel (Matthew 23:23-24).**

Those hypocrites completely failed to understand the righteousness of God. They interpreted the laws that God gave them (the ones they chose to obey) in a purely legalistic fashion, while ignoring the more important principles of righteousness, such as justice, mercy, and faith. Jesus commanded them to obey those vital principles, as well as all of the detailed aspects of the law (while it was still in force).

They were such blind guides that they were straining out gnats and swallowing camels. And I suspect that was another proverb Jesus gave that amused the multitudes who were hearing those rebukes. For no doubt many of the common people were aware of the hypocrisy of their religious leaders. Those leaders were the ones who were binding **“heavy burdens and difficult to bear”** and laying them upon men's shoulders, but not wanting **“to move them with their finger.”**

Woe for hypocrisy and inner uncleanness

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but inside they are full of plunder and unrighteousness. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and**

of the platter, so that the outside of them may also become clean (Matthew 23:25-26).

The cup and the platter symbolize the character of those pious appearing scholars and Pharisees. They were careful to appear noble, pious, and righteous. But in reality their hearts were full of plunder and unrighteousness. Many if not most of the leaders of the world are exactly the same way.

What Jesus taught was that if we cleanse our hearts of evil, then the way we look and act will be clean. The focus should always be upon the purity of the heart and the righteousness of our thoughts. For that is the way to change behavior from evil to good. Modern humanists teach the exact opposite. They strive to change the outward parts of people and think that will change their hearts. And when it fails, they blame everything but their false and perverted ideology.

Woe for hypocrisy and hidden corruption

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like white-washed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness** (Matthew 23:27-28).

Those are very harsh words for those scholars and Pharisees, and they reveal the depths of their hypocrisy. But those leaders were not unique to those times. For history is filled with examples of such men. Therefore, we need to be very careful about which of our leading men to believe, especially those who claim to be serving Christ. For remember, the scholars and Pharisees were considered the most zealous and faithful in their obedience to the laws of Moses.

Solomon spoke of such hypocrites when he said, **"Fervent lips and a wicked heart are an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross. He who hates masquerades with his lips, but he lays up deceit within him. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly shown before the assembly"** (Proverbs 26:23-26).

We need to use the same standard of judgment to expose them that Jesus gave to reveal false prophets: **"But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves. From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits.**

"Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. So then from their fruits ye will know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

Woe for hypocrisy and persecuting prophets

- **Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we**

had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So then ye testify to yourselves that ye are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Then fill ye up the measure of your fathers (Matthew 23:29-32).

The ancient Israelites persecuted all of the prophets in some way. Most people do not realize how rebellious those Israelites were. Consider what Moses himself said to them not long before he died: **“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you”** (Deuteronomy 9:24). Moreover, they often resented and rebelled against Moses as well as Jehovah. Rebellion against righteousness has been typical of their behavior throughout their history.

Stephen also told of their rebelliousness when he was being tried before the rulers of the Jews because of false accusations brought against him. He said to them, **“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it”** (Acts 7:51-53).

The Israelites were not unique in being rebellious against the will of God. That mentality against the righteousness of God is characteristic of all the sinners of the world. And alas, it is also very typical of many people who claim to believe in Christ. They piously claim to follow Jesus, but they ignore his commandments.

They speak well of the apostles of Jesus. Yet I have no doubt that were those men to return and teach the same words, they would be just as persecuted now as they were by the Jews. They would be persecuted because most modern believers in Christ are disobedient to him, clinging instead to their false doctrines and myths about him. And they resent all efforts to show them the truth, and to call upon them to repent and obey.

Long after prophets are persecuted and die, then later events always prove they were teaching the word of God. Therefore, the later generations honor them, and do things like build monuments and special sepulchers for them. That pattern is also typical among men.

Serpents and offspring of vipers

- **Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how will ye escape from the damnation of hell?** (Matthew 23:33).

After Jesus uttered those eight woes (curses) against the Jewish scholars and Pharisees, calling them foolish and blind men, blind guides and hypocrites, he then called them serpents and offspring of vipers. Both John the immerser and Jesus called the leaders of the Jews offspring of vipers. Here is what John said to them: **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his immersion, he said to them, Ye offspring of vipers, who showed you to flee from the coming wrath?”** (Matthew 3:7).

Those are very harsh words to speak against anyone. Indeed, I cannot think of anything harsher that could be said of them. Jesus even told them they were going to hell. Yet Jesus taught these words in his sermon on the mount: **“Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies,**

bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, so that ye may become sons of your Father in the heavens, because he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:43-45).

How then could Jesus curse the scribes and Pharisees, but say we should love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who mistreat us and persecute us? Actually, with those harsh words Jesus was showing his love for those men by warning them and giving them the opportunity to repent. For the only way they could escape from the damnation of hell was to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, and obey his commandments.

Warning those scholars and Pharisees, and offering them salvation, was the kind of love and good to his enemies that he taught us. Therefore, we have the same obligation to warn sinners, in the strongest terms. Loving our enemies, blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us, and praying for those who mistreat us and persecute us, does not mean we should never offend them or tell them how evil they are. Use the example of how Jesus responded to his enemies.

Persecuting those sent by God

- **Because of this, behold, I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scholars. And some of them ye will kill and crucify, and some of them ye will scourge in your synagogues, and will persecute from city to city, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, that all these things will come upon this generation (Matthew 23:34-36).**

That generation during the time of Jesus had the very Son of God in their midst, teaching them about the kingdom of the heavens, and offering them eternal salvation. Yet they persecuted him, and eventually crucified him. Moreover, they persecuted all of those he sent to them, which included wise men and scholars.

Therefore, forty years after Jesus began his ministry, God sent the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem, the temple, and their nation. And he scattered the remnant of the survivors throughout other nations. That generation deserved so great a punishment because of what they had done to the very Son of God and to his servants.

Abel was the first man ever murdered. And he was murdered because his deeds were righteous and the deeds of his brother Cain (the man who murdered him) were unrighteous.

Regarding Zachariah son of Barachiah, there is disagreement about who he was. There were several men in the Old Testament named Zechariah, but none named Zachariah.

The man Jesus mentioned is probably the man who has a book listed in the Old Testament. Here is how his book begins: **“In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Jehovah came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, Jehovah was greatly displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou to them, Thus says Jehovah of hosts: Return to me, says Jehovah of hosts, and I**

will return to you, says Jehovah of hosts” (Zechariah 1:1-3). However, there is no record of how he died.

We do have a record of a Zechariah who was murdered in the temple area. However, the Bible says he was the son of Jehoiada: **“And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest. And he stood above the people, and said to them, Thus says God, Why do ye transgress the commandments of Jehovah, so that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken Jehovah, he has also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah”** (Second Chronicles 24:20-21).

Nevertheless, it is not important for us to know such details. They are incidental to the message Jesus was making.

Because Jerusalem rejected him it is rejected

- **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I wanted to gathered thy children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, ye will, no, not see me henceforth, until ye say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord** (Matthew 23:37-39).

The apostle Paul says that Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament. For speaking of the Israelites that Moses led in the wilderness after their Egyptian bondage, he said, **“And they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ”** (First Corinthians 10:3-4). That spiritual rock that followed them was Jehovah, who later lived as a man on the earth to redeem our souls: Jesus the Christ.

Jesus, as Jehovah in the Old Testament, often wanted to shelter and protect his people in Israel, as only God can. Yet they constantly refused him. They even killed his prophets and stoned those he sent to speak to them. God is very longsuffering. However, his patience is not forever. Therefore, because of their continued rebellion he made their house desolate—utterly destroyed.

Here is what the Bible record says about why God destroyed them the first time: **“Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place.**

“But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or virgin, old man or hoary-headed. He gave them all into his hand” (Second Chronicles 36:14-17).

Jesus said they would never see the Son of God again until they bless those who come in the name of the Lord. Those words could mean they would never understand anything about him until they repented and became his disciples. It could also mean they would never see him again until the day of judgment.

Prophesying the destruction of the temple

- **And when Jesus departed he was going from the temple. And his disciples came near to exhibit to him the buildings of the temple. But Jesus said to them, Do ye not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will be left here, no, not a stone upon a stone, that will not be thrown down (Matthew 24:1-2).**

Jesus was never impressed by the things of the world, including that magnificent temple. Therefore, when some spoke of the glories of the temple, he use the occasion to tell them the days were coming during which **“there will not be left a stone upon a stone that will not be thrown down.”** The complete destruction of the temple occurred forty years after Jesus began his ministry, and it has never been rebuilt. Indeed, it never will be.

Wanting to know when

- **And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what is the sign of thy coming, and of the termination of the age? (Matthew 24:3).**

When Jesus prophesied to his disciples about the complete destruction of the temple, some of them later questioned him for more details. For Mark says it was Peter, James, John, and Andrew who were the disciples that questioned him privately about those things (see Mark 13:3).

They actually asked him two questions: (1) When would that destruction happen, and (2) what would be the sign of his return from heaven and the end of the world? His disciples may have actually believed the two events would happen together. They may not have thought the temple would ever be completely destroyed before the end of the world.

Nevertheless, Jesus did not clarify the difference between the two events. I have no doubt he did that for a reason. Perhaps it was to give scoffers and other unbelievers an opportunity to dismiss his prophecy. God has made many things in the world so that sinners can justify not believing in him and his holy word. For he is testing our souls, and he wants the unworthy to condemn themselves.

Jesus did not tell them when those things would happen, but he did tell them what would be the signs. And that is told a little farther in this record of his answer. But first he gave them some warnings about the future.

Be not led astray by false Christs

- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, See that not any man may lead you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will lead many astray (Matthew 24:4-5).**

After almost two thousand years it is rare now for some man to claim he is the Christ. Nevertheless, I have seen many men who proclaimed they were saviors. And they gathered a large following of people who believed in them. Yet eventually such men always proved to be false, and their followers suffered because of it. I have seen the tragic consequences of that happening with many of them. Yet there are still some who have not been exposed. It is a continual overlapping process of such men rising and then falling. While some are falling, others are rising. Beware of them all.

The travails of the world

- **And ye are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that ye not be alarmed, for all the things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and plagues and earthquakes in places. But all these things are the beginning of travail (Matthew 24:6-8).**

After that warning Jesus told them to expect many tribulations in the world before the end happens—wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes. Those things happen in every generation, and they will continue till the end of the world. When Jesus said all those things were the beginning of travail, he was simply saying that when wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes happen to them, those things were just the beginning of such travails. For they will happen in every generation until the end of the world.

Warnings about evils coming against them

- **Then they will deliver you up for tribulation, and will kill you, and ye will be hated by all the nations because of my name. And then many will be caused to stumble, and they will betray each other and will hate each other. And many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. And because of the increased lawlessness, the love of the many will become cold. But he who endures to the end, this man will be saved (Matthew 24:9-13).**

Jesus also warned his disciples about the severe persecutions they would suffer. He told about how many of them would fall away and turn against each other. He again warned about the many false prophets that would lead many astray. And he said increased lawlessness would cause the love of many to become cold. The love he was referring to was the love of God and Christ and the word of God.

That love would become cold by the many (the majority) because of increased lawlessness. As sin increases so also peace and order decrease in the land. And that not only increases the stresses of living, but it adds more temptations to sin. Hence, the love of the many will become cold.

Nevertheless, I do not believe those evils will be single events. Those things are cyclical. Falling away and betrayal, increased lawlessness and love growing cold. Those are things that continually increase and decrease over the centuries. They are all part of the many cycles of the ways of this world, like day and night, summer and winter.

After those warnings of persecution and tribulation, Jesus gave them words of encouragement. He said the man who endures is he who will be saved. Remember what the book of Acts says that Paul and his co-workmen taught the disciples about tribulations. They said **“it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). Tribulations test our souls, and enable us to show our worthiness for becoming sons of God for eternity.

Our greatest defense against the tribulations of the world is the faith and hope we have through our Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Indeed, the apostle John said that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world: **“And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. And who is he who overcomes the world, if not he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** (First John 5:4-5). Therefore, treasure your faith and hope above all things.

The entire world will hear his good news

- **And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come** (Matthew 24:14).

Jesus prophesied that his good news of the kingdom of God would be proclaimed in the whole world. It would be proclaimed for a testimony to all the nations. That testimony is the word of God for mankind. It reveals who he really is, why we exist, how he wants us to live, and how we can have eternal life to live forever with him in heaven. It is his testimony of the good news of our salvation in the kingdom of God. And the end of the world will not happen until that good news of the kingdom has been proclaimed in the whole world for a testimony to all mankind.

Remember, Jesus prophesied that would happen when he only had a relatively few disciples and the kingdom had not yet been established. The good news of the kingdom has now been proclaimed most everywhere on the earth, although there are some communist and Islamic countries that strive to suppress it.

Nevertheless, it is my belief that the good news of the kingdom of God will literally spread throughout the world, meaning the universe. For I believe that mankind is going to colonize the entire universe. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

When Jerusalem will be destroyed

- **When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation that was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him who reads understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the man on the housetop not go down to take things from his house. And let the man in**

the field not return back to take his clothes. And woe to those who have in the womb and to those who suckle in those days.

- **And pray ye that your flight may not happen in winter, nor on a sabbath, for then there will be great tribulation, such as not has happened from the beginning of the world until now, nor, no, it will not happen. And if those days were not shortened, no flesh would be saved. But because of the chosen those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:15-22).**

Jesus here prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The abomination of desolation is part of a prophecy told to Daniel by an agent from heaven. Here is that part: **“And forces shall stand on his part, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate” (Daniel 11:31).**

The abomination that makes desolate, the abomination of desolation, refers to the Roman army. They were an abomination that came to Israel and brought complete desolation to Jerusalem and the temple. They broke into the temple itself, even into the holy place. They were therefore, the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place.

Jesus warned his disciples that as soon as they saw it happening to make great haste and immediately flee from Jerusalem and Judea to escape the great tribulations the Roman army would bring there. Indeed, he said the tribulation of those days would be the most severe the world had ever seen or ever will see. And if God had not cut the time short every soul in Judea would have perished. That was how much wrath God had unleashed against that sinful generation of Jews who forsook his only begotten Son and murdered him. But because of the few who were faithful, God shortened the days of that destruction.

When those things happened the Roman army was apparently so full of fury and had so much power, that they wanted nothing but death and a completely scorched earth for the land of Israel. The Jews had always been a thorn in the side of the Romans because the Jews had such a fierce attitude of superiority, contempt for Gentiles, and rebellious independence.

Therefore, Jesus gave that strict warning for his disciples to flee regardless of what they left behind. And they were to pray that circumstances (like winter, or the sabbath day, or a woman being pregnant or caring for a young infant) would not make their flight more difficult. Regarding the sabbath, remember, the Jews had created a law to limit how much travel could be done on the sabbath. And if they violated that law they would not only face the wrath of the Romans but also the wrath of the Jews. For the Jews fiercely resisted the Romans, and they resented all who would not stay and fight.

Moreover, the fanatical Jews kept everyone in the city and would not allow any to escape. They kept everyone there to help fight the Roman army. That was why Jesus' disciples needed to escape out of the city as quickly as possible. For the people of the city suffered enormously, first by famine cause by the siege, and then by the vicious Roman army when they conquered it.

Beware of false Christs

- **Then if any man should say to you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here, believe ye not. For there will arise false Christs and false prophets, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen. Behold, I have foretold it to you** (Matthew 24:23-25).

The Jews were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Messiah to save them. They expected he would be a great warrior-king who would defeat all their enemies. Therefore, Jesus warned about the many false Christs and false prophets that would arise. And he warned they would give great signs and wonders to lead people astray.

Those signs and wonders would be so impressive that the faith of even his loyal disciples would be challenged. The chosen of God are those who have made their souls such that they are worthy of his salvation. But they are not specific people predestined for salvation independent of their will. For remember, God is completely impartial.

Nevertheless, whatever great signs and wonders were done by such false Christs and false prophets they were not miracles. Instead, they were extremely effective illusions, so effective that people were convinced of their reality. Such kinds of illusions are commonly produced by entertainers called conjurers, magicians, and illusionists. However, those false Christs and false prophets would deceive the people into thinking they were true miracles.

Dear reader, never be deceived that way. You can marvel about how spectacular such things may appear. But never be deceived into believing them. For they can never stand the test of careful scrutiny by those who are skilled in exposing them. Remember how Jesus forewarned against such deceivers.

How Jesus will return

- **If therefore they should say to you, Behold, he is in the wilderness, do not go forth. Behold, he is in the inner chambers, do not believe. For as the lightning comes out from the east, and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of man. For wherever the carcass may be, there the vultures will be gathered together** (Matthew 24:26-28).

Jesus also warned against listening to men who claim he has returned. For his return will be so noticeable everywhere that it will be like lightning that illuminates the entire sky. Indeed, he will become visible to the entire world.

What he said about the vultures is quite a mystery. Since he was speaking about false Christs and false prophets, then perhaps those are the vultures, and perhaps the carcass symbolizes those who are dead in sin. Thus, all who are alive in Christ should have no fear of being devoured by false Christs and false prophets. For they will not be attracted to us. They only feed upon the spiritually dead.

Signs of the end

- **But straightaway after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken** (Matthew 24:29).

What Jesus said did not mean that after that destruction of Jerusalem and the temple the world would end. When he said the tribulation of those days he was referring to the tribulation of this age. The world will end immediately after whatever specific tribulations may be occurring at the time of the end. For the travails and tribulations of this world will continue until the end.

Jesus said the end of the world will begin with the onset of darkness throughout the universe. And apparently the stars of the sky will fall toward each other in a shrinking space. Scientists tell us that most of the world, including the stars of the heavens are empty space. In fact, according to the commonly accepted Big Bang theory, the entire world began smaller than an atomic particle. And it could shrink that small again.

Indeed, the modern theory of the Big Crunch predicts such a thing will happen. That theory claims the Big Bang will be reversed into a Big Crunch. Thus, according to that theory, all the mighty celestial bodies will be removed or shaken from their positions, and will fall together into an ever shrinking space, smaller than an atomic particle. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

I mention those things to explain scientifically how stars can literally fall from the sky. Jesus did not say it would happen exactly like the Big Crunch theory, but he did say the stars would fall from the sky. And the only way that could happen is if they began shrinking and falling toward the earth.

Nevertheless, regardless of how it happens, we as Christians believe the prophecy of Jesus will be fulfilled. For he is the Son of God who created everything. Consider what the apostle John said about him: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be”** (John 1:1-3).

How his return will appear

- **And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky. And then all the tribes of the earth will beat the breast, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and much glory. And he will send forth his agents with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the boundaries of the heavens—as far as their boundaries** (Matthew 24:30-31).

At the end of the world some kind of awesome sign of the Son of man, Jesus Christ, is going to appear in the sky. And it will somehow appear in a way that all the peoples of the world will see it. And when they see him coming in the sky with power and much glory, it will cause them great alarm and fear.

For when the apostle John had his vision of the end, he said, **“And I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black as hairy sackcloth, and the whole moon became as blood. And the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree that casts its unripe figs being shaken by a great wind. And the sky departed as a scroll being rolled up. And every mountain and island were moved out of their places.**

“And the kings of the earth, and the rulers, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Because the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Revelation 6:12-17).

Sinners will fear his return. We however, should rejoice, because the first thing Jesus is going to do is send forth his agents with a mighty sound to gather his chosen from throughout the universe, from the boundaries of the heavens, from their very boundaries.

Here is how the apostle Paul describes that great time: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words”** (First Thessalonians 4:15-18).

Those who proclaim that Jesus is coming back to reign upon the earth are wrong; it is deluded wishful thinking. The Bible does not support that kind of thinking. When Jesus returns again he will be in the clouds of the sky, and we will be gathered with him in the air. After which we will live with him in heaven for eternity. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Recognizing signs

- **Now learn a parable from the fig tree. When its branch now becomes tender, and sprouts leaves, ye know that the summer is near. So ye also, when ye see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors. Truly I say to you, this generation will, no, not pass away, until all these things happen. The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away** (Matthew 24:32-35).

After describing what would happen at the end of the world, Jesus then warned his disciples with a parable to look for the signs that were going to come upon that generation; namely, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And he told them that would happen during the time of their generation, which it did. As they could anticipate summer coming by seeing the trees begin to spout their leaves, so also they could anticipate the coming destruction.

And what he meant by “**when ye see all these things**” was what he said about the abomination of desolation, the Roman army. And he reinforced the certainty of his prophecy by saying the world itself would pass away, but not his words.

The end will come unexpectedly

- **But about that day and hour no man knows, not even the agents of the heavens, except my Father only. And as the days of Noah, so also will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until that day Noah entered into the ark. And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of man** (Matthew 24:36-39).

Jesus next tells them about the end of the world. He told them that the time of the end of the world is known only to God. He even said that he himself, the Son of God, did not know when it would happen (see Mark 13:32). And he warned how it would come completely unexpected, just as the great flood came upon the antediluvian world (see Genesis 6-8). Not even Noah knew exactly when it would come until Jehovah told him to gather his family and all the animals into the ark.

The lesson for us is that we had better be prepared at all times to meet the Lord. We should never think we can postpone what we need to do in our preparations for him. And, dear reader, in one sense, that is also true of the death of each one of us. For we rarely know exactly when we are going to die. And after we die we will then face the judgment. I also speak more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Some will be taken and some left

- **Then two men will be in the field, one is taken, and one is left. Two women grinding at the mill, one is taken, and one is left** (Matthew 24:40-41).

That passage teaches how the righteous and the unrighteous will of necessity always be intermingled in the activities of the world. But God knows who belongs to him and who does not. That lesson is also taught in the parable of the wheat and tares. Here is what Jesus said at the end of that parable: “**Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles in order to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn**” (Matthew 13:30). Indeed, that lesson is taught throughout the New Testament.

At the end, all unrepentant sinners will be left behind to face their condemnation in the day of judgment, while all who belong to Christ will be brought up into heaven with him.

Be careful and watch

- **Watch therefore, because ye know not at what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the house-ruler had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be**

broken into. Because of this ye also be ready, because in that hour ye think not the Son of man comes (Matthew 24:42-44).

That is another example of the need to be prepared at all times. It is very foolhardy to think you can postpone things commanded by Christ without putting your soul in great jeopardy. Life is too uncertain for both young and old. Proof of that can be seen every day. Who has never been surprised at the sudden death of someone? Therefore, always be prepared and watch.

The example of watching carefully that the Lord gave, was a thief and a houseruler. Thieves are a threat to our property. As Jesus said about thieves, **“The thief comes not, except that he might steal and kill and destroy”** (John 10:10). Only a fool would not prepare himself if he knew when an evil thief was coming against his house. And only fools do not prepare themselves for when the good Lord comes to judge us.

Reward for faithful service

- **Who then is the faithful and wise bondman, whom his lord appointed over his service, to give them the provision on time? Blessed is that bondman, whom his lord when he comes will find so doing. Truly I say to you, that he will appoint him over all things being possessed by him** (Matthew 24:45-47).

That is another parable to warn us about being prepared for the judgment. The Lord is promising a great reward for those who serve him faithfully. Being a faithful and wise bondman means living a productive and righteous life regardless of what our role is here upon the earth. Jesus even says his faithful disciples will be given authority (under him) over all the nations: **“And he who overcomes, and he who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. And he will tend them with a rod of iron (they will be shattered like ceramic vessels), as I also have received from my Father”** (Revelation 2:26-27).

The nations of the world will be shattered like ceramic vessels at the end of the world. And we will rule over them (their populations) with unbreakable force. Moreover, with God and Christ we will rule over the nations of heaven as well. Only those deceived by the devil think that all we will do in heaven is sit on the grass and sing praises to God.

The world of heaven contains a dynamic and creative civilization, incomprehensibly superior to this one. And we, under the leadership of God and Christ, will reign over everything there. We will be the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation in heaven. For Peter said about us, **“But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession, so that ye might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (First Peter 2:9).

Punishment for unfaithfulness

- **But if that evil bondman should say in his heart, My lord is late coming, and should begin to beat the fellow bondmen, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that bondman will come in a day that he does not**

expect, and in an hour that he is not aware, and he will cut him in two, and place his share with the hypocrites. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:48-51).

This part of the parable is a warning against abusing our duty before Christ. Notice how severely the Lord will punish those who act cruelly and wantonly, instead of faithfully. He will cut them in two. There are not many things more severe that can be done to the body of a man. He will also place their share with the hypocrites. That share is the torment of hell, because Jesus said that is the place of the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

That warning against cruelty to servants also includes cruelty to children. All parents have power and authority over their children. But some parents (especially the drunkards) abuse them. The Bible authorizes our use of corporal punishment to help rear and discipline our children. However, the excessive application of corporal punishment will bring the wrath of God against those guilty of it.

Another lesson in that passage teaches us it is wrong to think every disciple of Christ will remain faithful to be rewarded in heaven. For example, when Paul was giving instructions for young Christian widows, he warned about temptations they would face. And he said, **“For some have already turned aside after Satan”** (First Timothy 5:15). And there are many other examples in the Bible of some disciples turning away from righteousness.

The parable of the ten virgins

- **Then the kingdom of the heavens will be like ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went forth to the bridegroom’s gathering. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, foolish women, who, having taken their lamps, took no olive oil with them. But the wise took olive oil in their vessels with their lamps.**
- **Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight a shout occurred, Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go ye forth for his gathering. Then all those virgins were roused, and put their lamps in order. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us from your olive oil, because our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Perhaps there may not be enough for us and you. But go ye rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.**
- **And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And the prepared entered in with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward the other virgins also came, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But having answered, he said, Truly I say to you, I know you not.**
- **Watch therefore, because ye know not the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes** (Matthew 25:1-13).

That is another parable about being wisely prepared for the judgment. Notice how the five foolish women who were not properly prepared were refused entrance into the festivities, even though they wanted to enter and had hoped for it. This parable teaches that faith in

God and Christ, having hope for salvation, and wanting to go to heaven are not enough. Notice also that those five foolish women were virgins. They were not wicked sinful women. Yet they were still rejected because they were not properly prepared.

Be not misled by the devil, and think that living as a peaceful and law abiding citizen will be enough for you to be accepted in heaven. As Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven, **“And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

Therefore, be ye wise like the five virgins who made careful preparation for the wedding festivity. Carefully prepare to face Christ on the judgment day so that you will be accepted and enter into the joys of heaven. Always be prepared, because Jesus said, **“Watch therefore, because ye know not the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes.”**

Another lesson in that parable is that we should do nothing to risk the salvation of our own soul. The wise virgins would not share what they had with the foolish ones, saying to them, **“Perhaps there may not be enough for us and you. But go ye rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.”**

The wise virgins would not share what they had because it would have risked their own entrance into the wedding festivities. We can risk our earthly lives to save the life of a man. But we should never risk our eternal salvation for any reason. Only a fool would do it, and if he did he would deserve losing his soul.

That parable about an earthly wedding could also be said to symbolize the heavenly wedding of the marriage of the Lamb. For the book of Revelation says, **“And I heard as the sound of a large multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, Praise the Lord! Because the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. We should be glad and rejoice and give the glory to him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has prepared herself. And it was given her that she clothe herself in fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the sanctified. And he says to me, Write, Blessed are those who have been called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true sayings of God”** (Revelation 19:6-9).

That marriage represents the time when Jesus will rein in the new Jerusalem of heaven with all of his faithful disciples after this world is over. The bride of the lamb is the new Jerusalem in heaven.

The parable of the talents

- **For, like a man going on a journey, he called his own bondmen, and delivered to them the things possessed by him. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his personal ability, and straightaway he journeyed. And having departed, the man who received the five talents worked with them, and made five other talents. And likewise also the man of the two gained two others. But having departed, the man who received the one dug in the ground, and hid his lord's silver.**

- **Now after a long time the lord of those bondmen comes, and takes up accounting with them. And having come, the man who received the five talents brought five other talents, saying, Lord, thou delivered five talents to me, lo, I have gained five other talents besides them. And his lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman. Thou were faithful over a few things, I will appoint thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**
- **And also having come, the man who received the two talents said, Lord, thou delivered two talents to me, lo, I have gained two other talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman. Thou were faithful over a few things, I will appoint thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**
- **And the man who received the one talent also having come, said, Lord, I knew thee that thou are a hard man, reaping where thou did not sow, and gathering from where thou did not scatter. And after being afraid, having gone, I hid thy talent in the ground. Lo, thou have thine own.**
- **But having answered, his lord said to him, Thou evil and lazy bondman, thou knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather from where I did not scatter. Thou ought therefore to have placed my silver with the bankers, and having come I would have received back my own with interest.**
- **Take ye therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every man who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast ye the unprofitable bondman into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:14-30).**

There are many lessons in that parable. Talents refer to both natural abilities and to money. Hence, the main lesson in that parable is that the Lord expects us to (1) use our natural abilities to increase our acquired abilities, knowledge, and skills, and (2) also use our material resources and finances wisely and productively to increase them.

In that parable talents were given according to each bondman's abilities. We all differ to some degree in the natural abilities that God gives us. But the more we have the more we are expected to produce.

The good and faithful bondmen worked with what they were given and were able to double their talents. The evil and lazy bondman failed to use what he was given. Hence, he produced nothing.

After a while the bondmen were called to account for what each one did. The men who worked with their talents and increased them were praised for being good and faithful. They were also rewarded with authority of many more things.

The man who was only given one talent accused his lord of being a hard man, taking what he did not work for. He apparently resented having to labor to give his lord whatever he might gain. And besides being a lazy man, he apparently feared that he might lose what he

received. Consequently, he hid the talent that was given him, and justified himself by returning what his lord gave him.

His lord rightly called him an evil and lazy bondman. And he reminded him of what that bondman himself knew: namely, that his lord took what he did not work for; that he expected to be given what the bondman worked for. But that is true of all employers; they expect to gain profits from the labor of their employees. In the world that is the only way they can stay in business. It is from those profits that they are able to maintain their business, hire employees, and pay them.

The man's lord then told him he should have deposited it with the bankers so it could have earned interest. That was the very least he should have done. Consequently, the lord took what the one talent man had and gave it to the man with the most talents. And he justified his decision with a lesson about who is given things and who has them taken away: **"For to every man who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him."**

That principle is true in many ways. For example, it is commonly known that the more money a man has the more he can gain. Also the less he has the less he can gain, which explains this proverb: **"The destruction of the poor is their poverty"** (Proverbs 10:15). Poverty keeps a man down even when he wants to work hard. For example, in America few men can even find employment if they do not own a car. That is an important reason why we should help the worthy poor.

Another example of the principle Jesus gave is the fact that the more a man learns the more he can learn. That is a major reason why the well educated learn so much better than those not well educated. And there are many other ways proving that principle.

Notice how it was the one talent man who neglected what he had and bore no fruit with it. That seems to be one of the dangers of having fewer talents. Those kinds of men are more tempted to fail to use what they have. And those who do fail to use what they have, give excuses to justify that neglect. That dangerous attitude is a risk for men who have lesser abilities, who live in poorer conditions, or who have fewer opportunities.

Nevertheless, that parable clearly teaches that God will have no sympathy for those with fewer things who do not use what they have. For in that parable the man's lord commanded the unprofitable bondman be cast into the outer darkness, which he said was the place of the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Suffering as an outcast in the world is nothing compared with suffering as an outcast in heaven. In heaven the place of outer darkness is the lake of fire called hell. That means severe punishment will be given to those who do not work with the talents God has given us, whether many or few, to be productive in his service. The popular doctrine of salvation by faith only is false; beware of being deceived by it.

Regarding the matter of interest, the law of Moses said, **"Thou shall not lend upon interest to thy brother: interest of money, interest of food, interest of anything that is lent upon interest. To a foreigner thou may lend upon interest, but to thy brother thou shall not lend upon interest, that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all that thou put thy hand to, in the land where thou go in to possess it"** (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

Notice how the passage refers to their fellow Israelites as brothers. That was why they were not allowed to charge interest on loans to each other. They were to be a close knit people of God. However, they were allowed to charge interest to foreigners. The law also spoke of a year of release, during which time loan payments were postponed (but not cancelled). I speak more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Regarding compensation for lending, the Lord does approve of receiving some of the gains of loaned property. Remember this story: **“Hear ye another parable. There was a certain man who was a house-ruler, who planted a vineyard, and placed a hedge around it, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and leased it to farmers, and went on a journey. And when the time of the fruits approached, he sent his bondmen to the farmers to receive his fruits”** (Matthew 21:33-34).

As disciples of Christ we are under the law of liberty. We have the freedom to judge about how we conduct the affairs of our lives. For Paul said, **“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under control by anything”** (First Corinthians 6:12). And that includes whether to charge interest or require some kind of compensation for loans we may make to our fellow Christians.

Being separated in the judgment

- **But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy agents with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from each other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will truly place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left** (Matthew 25:31-33).

When Jesus came into the world as a man he lived a humble life, first as a common carpenter, then as a poor traveling preacher. Remember what Jesus replied to the scholar who said he would follow him wherever he went: **“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky, nests, but the Son of man has nowhere he may lay his head”** (Matthew 8:20).

However, when Jesus returns he will come in his glory and all the holy agents with him. He will return in the clouds to gather together all who belong to him. And then he will sit on the throne of his glory in heaven with all the nations gathered before him. That is what will happen on the day of judgment.

And on that day Jesus will separate all the people of the world. He will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Jesus said he would separate them as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Jesus often referred to those who love truth and righteousness as sheep. He referred to them that way because sheep are gentle and obedient.

Jesus will separate his sheep from the goats, because the goats are aggressive and self-willed. Jesus is going to separate the gentle and obedient souls who follow him from the aggressive and self-willed ones who live for themselves. Those who belong to him will be placed at his right hand, while all unrepentant sinners will be at the left.

Reward for being compassionate

- **Then the King will say to those at his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in, naked, and ye clothed me. I was feeble, and ye came to help me. I was in prison, and ye came to me.**
- **Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, and fed thee, or thirsting, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked, and clothed thee? And when did we see thee weak, or in prison, and came to thee? And having answered, the King will say to them, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as ye did it to one of these my brothers, the least, ye did it to me (Matthew 25:34-40).**

Notice how Jesus said to those who belong to him that they were blessed by his heavenly Father. He also said they were inheriting the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. From the very beginning God intended for us to inherit his kingdom in heaven. And as we live in this world God tests our souls, whether we are worthy of that inheritance. And the word of God tells us how we can make ourselves worthy.

Part of showing our worthiness is how we treat other people, especially those who are suffering and in need. To be worthy of inheriting the kingdom of God in heaven we must be compassionate toward the poor and the afflicted, just as Jesus was.

Indeed, in the above passage Jesus told how he identifies with the hungry and thirsty, with the strangers and ill-clothed, with the feeble and those persecuted with imprisonment. And Jesus says that whoever helps any soul who suffers innocently in those kinds of ways will be helping him. And what disciple of Christ would not leap at the chance to help Christ himself if he were in need?

Now I want to clarify the matter of visiting those in prison. Remember, Jesus said about visiting in prison, **"... one of these my brothers."** But few people in prison are brothers of Christ. In fact the great majority of prisoners are disciples of the devil. How could Jesus say that visiting murderers and other vicious criminals was equivalent to visiting him? Does Jesus identify with such men? He certainly does not. For you will never find an example in the New Testament record of that happening by any of his disciples.

Jesus mean visiting those who were in prison innocently, such as those who were persecuted by the authorities because of their faith in him. There are many examples in the Bible of righteous men being cast into prison because of their righteousness.

Moreover, attempting to evangelize guilty criminals is a very dangerous and difficult task. Like working on high voltage power lines, it should never be attempted by anyone not trained properly and well prepared for it. There are many books containing many cases of persons who tried to do good to prisoners who suffered for it; some were even killed by them. There have no doubt been some successes, but attempting to convert them is like trying to grow crops on rocks. It is much better to expend our efforts with good soil, just as evangelists like Peter and Paul did.

If you visit such criminals in prison be extremely cautious and discriminating, and choose carefully who you try to convert. Did Jesus try to convert Herod when he met with him? Here is what Luke says about it: **“Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad, for he was wanting of a considerable time to see him, because of hearing many things about him, and he hoped to see some sign happening by him. And he interrogated him in considerable words, but he answered him nothing”** (Luke 23:8-9). Jesus would not even speak with Herod.

Be not naive about wicked men. Remember this warning by Jesus: **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turned back may lacerate you”** (Matthew 7:6). There may be hope for some of them who genuinely repent of their crimes. But do not waste your time attempting to convert hardened criminals. They are much more dangerous than wild dogs and swine.

And that warning applies to some of the poor and the afflicted as well. Some of them are like the dogs and the swine. Therefore, we must be careful and discriminating in how we help other people. Jesus wants us to help the worthy among them, not those who are unworthy. Therefore, be wise and prudent when you help them. Help those who are the faithful brothers of Christ, not the dogs and the swine.

Punishment for being heartless

- **Then he will also say to those at the left hand, Depart from me, ye accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his agents. For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger, and ye did not take me in, naked, and ye did not clothe me, weak, and in prison, and ye did not come to help me.**
- **Then they will also answer, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, or thirsting, or a stranger, or naked, or weak, or in prison, and did not serve thee? Then he will answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of these least, ye did it not to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life** (Matthew 25:41-46).

That is the other side of what Jesus is going to do on the day of judgment. Notice how Jesus emphasizes what we do or not do, and not just our faith in him. Our faith is just the beginning. If it does not provoke good works like the ones Jesus spoke about, then it is a dead and useless faith that will be punished and not rewarded.

And regarding our brothers and sisters in Christ who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, ill-clothed, or persecuted with imprisonment, it is not enough for us to just wait for them to ask for our help. When we know they are weak and vulnerable, we need to reach out to them with help whenever we have the opportunities.

Jesus warned that failing to do those things will result in eternal punishment in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his agents. We do not need to be wicked sinners to be cast

into hell with the devil and those who serve him. Just failing to show compassion to our fellow Christians when they need our help will result in that severe eternal punishment.

Jesus again prophesies his betrayal and crucifixion

- **And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, Ye know that after two days the Passover comes, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified (Matthew 26:1-2).**

Several times during their travels Jesus prophesied his death to his disciples. Sometimes he also prophesied being raised after three days, although in this example that is not mentioned. This time, however, Jesus said his betrayal and crucifixion would happen in two days, at the time of the Passover feast.

Jesus always knew he was going to be crucified. Indeed, losing his life in obedience to the Father was why he came into the world. For just before Jesus was betrayed, he prayed to God, and said, **“Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But because of this I came to this hour”** (John 12:27). Jesus came into the world to sacrifice his life in perfect obedience to God in this sinful world. That would prove sin was not inevitable, and it would earn him the right to become our Redeemer. And his crucifixion was the culmination of that life of perfect obedience. For it was God’s will that he sacrifice his earthly life to the point of crucifixion.

Plotting to take Jesus by trickery and kill him

- **Then the chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders of the people, assembled together to the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they deliberated so that they might take Jesus by trickery, and kill him. But they said, Not during the feast, lest an uproar develop among people (Matthew 26:3-5).**

Jesus had earlier told those chief priests and scholars they were sons of the devil, and they proved it by their actions. They were not interested in truth or in justice. They condemned Jesus because they hated both him and what he taught. As sons of the devil they were serving the wishes of the devil. They sought to take Jesus by trickery and then kill him. They were just as evil and ruthless as the modern crime bosses, such as those of the Mafia.

Moreover, they were not only wicked men, but they were also cowards. They feared the people. Wicked rulers are often restrained by their fear of the population. Wicked rulers are also often very suspicious, always having a background of fear in their minds. And that can make them very ruthless to individuals.

Caiaphas was the high priest at that time. Only the descendants of Aaron could be high priests. And since there were now many of his descendants, some of them were appointed to the high priesthood to serve that office for limited times. How they were chosen during that time in history varied.

John’s biography of Jesus mentioned Caiaphas being the high priest when Jesus was crucified: **“So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested**

Jesus and bound him, and led him away first to Annas. For he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year” (John 18:12-13).

The book of Acts then tells how Annas was later the high priest: **“And it came to pass on the morrow, to be assembled in Jerusalem, their rulers, and elders, and scholars, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the high priestly family” (Acts 4:5-6).**

Precious ointment for Jesus

- **Now when Jesus happened to be in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster cruse of precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head as he sat relaxing. But when his disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for much, and given to the poor.**
- **But Jesus knowing it, he said to them, Why do ye cause troubles to the woman? For she has wrought a good work upon me. For ye always have the poor with you, but ye do not always have me. For by pouring this ointment upon my body, she did it for my burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this good news may be proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman did will also be told for a memorial of her (Matthew 26:6-13).**

Remember, Bethany was a village about two miles from Jerusalem, which means it took less than an hour to go from one to the other. The record of this occasion is the only time Simon the leper is mentioned in the Bible. Jesus had probably healed him of his leprosy at some time, but there is no record of it. Simon must have had a very severe case of leprosy for him to still be called Simon the leper.

Regarding alabaster, according to a dictionary I have, it is “a translucent, whitish, fine-grained variety of gypsum, used for statues, vases, etc.” What the woman brought was no doubt a high quality cruse that contained the precious ointment.

Regarding the reason why she used it on Jesus, should not the Son of God himself have the best ointment placed on him, especially when he was soon going to endure great suffering for our salvation? There is a time and use for all things, a time to conserve for the poor and a time to expend for an extraordinary person and event. The woman was not named, nor is anything else told about her. Nevertheless, she obviously had great love for Jesus to make that sacrifice for him.

That story also shows the compassion Jesus has for even the most humble and lowly soul. He came to the woman’s defense because she provided that precious ointment for him at great expense to her. It was an unselfish sacrifice for a noble cause. And her values were better than those of her accusers. Therefore, Jesus not only defended her, but he honored her greatly with his prophecy about how she would be remembered.

And in heaven he will defend and honor all the humble and lowly of the world who sacrifice for him, and value him above all else. And remember, whatever kindness we show to anyone who belongs to him is the same as showing kindness to him.

Judas agrees to betray Jesus

- **Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, having gone to the chief priests, he said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him to you? And they weighed out to him thirty silver pieces. And from that time he sought a favorable opportunity so that he might betray him** (Matthew 26:14-16).

John's biography of Jesus says that Judas was the man who first accused the woman of wasting the ointment (see John 12:4-5). And since the text says that Judas then went to the chief priests to offer to betray Jesus, perhaps Judas felt humiliated by the rebuke Jesus made of his accusation. And Judas' resentment may have provoked him to make the offer to betray Jesus. However, the Bible says nothing about that; it is only a conjecture based upon the timing.

Notice that Judas wanted to be paid to betray Jesus. In his biography of Jesus, John also said that Judas was a thief. Judas obviously loved money more than righteousness. He was completely unworthy to be a disciple of Christ, much less an apostle. Jesus only chose him to fulfill this prophecy about his betrayal: **"Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9).

Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was an evil man, because he once said to his apostles, **"Did I not choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"** (John 6:70). And the record says he was referring to Judas.

The thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas to betray Jesus was prophesied in the book of Zechariah: **"And I said to them, If ye think good, give me my wage, and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my wage thirty pieces of silver"** (Zechariah 11:12). The context of that prophecy made it impossible for anyone to understand what it meant before it actually happened. And that is true of many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, especially those about Jesus. The value of those prophecies about him was not to reveal the future, but to confirm that Jesus was the Son of God by his fulfillment of them.

The chief priests paid Judas in advance, probably to help ensure he would not change his mind. The reason Judas sought a favorable opportunity to betray Jesus, was because the multitudes protected him. That is why the rulers of the Jews had not already arrested him. Judas chose a place at night where the multitudes were unavailable to see him arrested.

Preparing for the last supper

- **Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where do thou want that we should prepare for thee to eat the Passover? And he said, Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, The teacher says, My time is near. I keep the Passover with my disciples with thee. And the disciples did as Jesus arranged for them, and they prepared the Passover** (Matthew 26:17-19).

The Passover feast required using unleavened bread and an unblemished male lamb for the feast. Remember, the Passover feast was to celebrate the salvation of their firstborn sons

when God slew all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians the night before their exodus from Egypt.

Here is the law for the original Passover feast: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye to all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household be too little for a lamb, then he and his neighbor next to his house shall take one according to the number of the souls, according to every man’s eating ye shall make your count for the lamb.**

“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. Ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats. And ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening.

“And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel upon the houses in which they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread, with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat of it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire, its head with its legs and with the inwards of it. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning, but that which remains of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

“And thus ye shall eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And ye shall eat it in haste. It is Jehovah’s Passover.

“For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am Jehovah. And the blood shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where ye are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

“And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to Jehovah; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever” (Exodus 12:1-14).

Regarding the command for them to **“keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.”** Remember, words in the Bible languages like forever do not have the same absolute meaning as they do in our language. Forever in that command simply meant as long as the law of Moses was in effect.

The Israelites departed Egypt the very next morning after the Passover. Indeed, the Egyptians urged them to leave quickly because they were afraid they were all going to die.

Modern Jews, ever legalists, criticize Jesus and his apostles for celebrating Passover that way. They claim the law restricted Passover to households, because that is what the law said were to celebrate it.

They are great hypocrites, because not one of them criticize their fellow Jews for not going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, because that is what the law commanded: **“Thou may not sacrifice the Passover within any of thy gates, which Jehovah thy God gives thee, but at the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose to cause his name to dwell in [Jerusalem was later chosen], there thou shall sacrifice the Passover**

at evening, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou came forth out of Egypt. And thou shall roast and eat it in the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose, and thou shall turn in the morning, and go to thy tents" (Deuteronomy 16:5-7). The place which Jehovah would choose was not named because they had not yet entered into their promised land.

Originally the Passover feast was separate from the feast of unleavened bread. However, it was not long before they were joined together. I discuss those things much more in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Mark gave a little more detail about what Jesus commanded them: **"And he sends forth two of his disciples, and says to them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him"** (Mark 14:12-13).

Jesus says one of them would betray him

- **Now having become evening, he was sitting with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, Truly I say to you, that one of you will betray me. And being exceedingly sorrowful, they began, each of them, to say to him, Is it I, Lord?**
- **And having answered, he said, He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, this man will betray me. The Son of man indeed goes as it is written about him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for him if that man had not been born** (Matthew 26:20-24).

Several times Jesus told his apostles that he would be betrayed. This was the first time he said one of them would be the betrayer. Since each of them asked him if he would be the one, it is obvious the others could not believe that one of them would betray him deliberately. They no doubt thought the betrayal would be accidental. And the record says they were exceedingly sorrowful. By asking Jesus who it was they no doubt thought perhaps it could be prevented.

Jesus' comment about his betrayer dipping his hand with him in the dish is from the same prophecy about him being betrayed: **"Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9). All of the apostles were dipping their hands in the dish with him, and so that comment did not identify the guilty man. The book of John tells how Jesus first revealed who the man was to the apostles John and Peter.

Dipping the hand in the dish probably means using pieces of the bread and/or of the lamb to collect whatever porridge or other soft food they were eating. And apparently they had one large dish into which they all dipped. If there had been several small dishes, they could have narrowed down who would betray Jesus. For he said it was he who dipped in the dish with him. But with one large dish that would not identify the man. Nevertheless, when it became Judas' turn to ask if he was the man, Jesus said he was the one (see the next passage).

Jesus said it was necessary for him to go as it was written about him, which refers to his trial and crucifixion. Nevertheless, he still uttered a curse against his betrayer, saying, "..."

woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for him if that man had not been born.” Remember, a woe is a curse.

Yet Judas was not deterred from betraying him. Judas may not have taken the curse seriously, because he had no faith in him, no more than the scholars and Pharisees that Jesus cursed. Notice how the other apostles addressed Jesus as Lord, but (as shown in the next passage) Judas addressed him as “Rabbi.” Rabbi means teacher.

Jesus identifies his betrayer

- **And Judas (the man who betrayed him) having answered, he said, Is it I, Rabbi? He says to him, Thou have said** (Matthew 26:25).

Although his apostles thought the betrayal would be accidental, Jesus knew it would be done deliberately, and he identified Judas as his betrayer. However, the other apostles apparently did not think Judas would do it deliberately, because they did not respond against him. Had they known Judas would do it willfully there is no doubt they would have condemned him. But thinking it would be accidental they probably had pity for him.

The Bible expressions “**Thou have said**” and “**Thou say**” mean yes.

Instituting the Lord's supper

- **And as they were eating, Jesus, having taken bread, having expressed thanks, broke in pieces, and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And having taken the cup, having expressed thanks, he gave to them, saying, All ye drink of it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for remission of sins.**
- **But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom** (Matthew 26:26-29).

Those things happened during the last supper with his apostles. And it describes how Jesus established that simple ceremony as a memorial of him and his great sacrifice for our salvation. The record about it in Luke's biography of him also contains these words: “**Do ye this in my memory**” (Luke 22:19). Mark's biography of him also describes how Jesus instituted that ceremony. Only John's biography of him omits it.

The apostle Paul also wrote about how Jesus established that simple ceremony, when he said, “**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and said, Take ye, eat, this is my body broken for you. This do ye in my memory. Likewise also the cup after the supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as ye drink it, in my memory. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he comes**” (First Corinthians 11:23-26). Notice how Paul also quoted Jesus saying they were to do it in his memory.

All four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, reported how Jesus said the cup of it was his blood of the new covenant. God made several covenants with men in the past. His covenant with the sons of Israel involving the law of Moses is traditionally called the Old Covenant. The good news of Christ is the New Covenant, and it says that God will forgive our sins and adopt us to be his sons for eternity in heaven, if we will believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

And that good news is the last covenant God made with man, because it is an eternal covenant. As the author of Hebrews said, **“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood of an eternal covenant—our Lord Jesus—may he make you fully qualified in every good work in order to do his will, doing in you what is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly”** (Hebrews 13:20-21).

It is also a covenant in blood, the blood of the sinless Son of God. The fruit of the grapevine that we drink during the Lord’s supper symbolizes his blood. Both the bread and the fruit of the grapevine symbolize his great sacrifice for us, the sacrifice of his very life upon the cruel cross. And we partake of them to remember that sacrifice.

Jesus did not command when or how often to observe that ceremony. He simply said that as often as we did it we proclaimed his death, sacrificing his life that way for us. Paul went on to say much more about that ceremony. He wrote to those brothers in Corinth in an attempt to correct how they had misapplied and abused it.

Yet there is still some controversy about performing that ceremony. Men dispute about when and how often to partake of it; a few of them dispute about whether there should only be one cup and one loaf; some even dispute about whether to use wine or just grape juice because the Bible does not say specifically whether the fruit of the grapevine was fermented or not. That drink was their most common beverage, and is colored red like blood.

Men also dispute about whether they should only use unleavened bread, which is what they used at the last supper. The last supper was held in obedience to the command for the annual Passover feast. And only unleavened bread was allowed for that feast.

Jesus never gave detailed instructions about that simple ceremony because his good news is a law of liberty. As James said, **“So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty”** (James 2:12). Therefore, it is a mistake to dispute about such things. Paul wrote much to discourage Christians from disputing about matters of opinion (see Romans 14). What is important is that it be done frequently enough to keep his great sacrifice in our memory, and that it should be done with dignity and solemnity. All that is required is bread and fruit of the grapevine. All else is under the law of liberty.

In Matthew’s biography of Jesus he said that Jesus expressed thanks after taking bread. However, Mark says that Jesus blessed after taking bread. Apparently therefore, expressing thanks to God for the bread is the same as blessing it. It is the same as blessing, because once the bread is used as part of this memorial it becomes holy and is therefore blessed. It is blessed, but not according to the incredibly fantastic and ridiculous Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. It is astonishing that anyone believes in that doctrine.

Jesus says they will scatter

- **And having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives. Then Jesus says to them, All ye will be caused to stumble by me in this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee (Matthew 26:30-32).**

Jesus warns them they would all be caused to stumble by him that night, and he quoted the prophecy about it, which is in this passage of the Old Testament: **“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my companion, says Jehovah of hosts. Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered”** (Zechariah 13:7).

His apostles would all be scattered because Jesus their shepherd would be smitten by the rulers of the Jews. Although Jesus warned them many times it would happen, they would still be confused and alarmed when it occurred, which would cause them to scatter. And Jesus warned them they would.

Nevertheless, Jesus assured them he would be raised up and would go before them into Galilee. Whenever Jesus warned his disciples of troubles to come, he almost always gave them words of encouragement.

Jesus prophesies Peter's denial of him

- **But having answered, Peter said to him, If all men will be caused to stumble by thee, I will never be caused to stumble. Jesus said to him, Truly I say to thee, that in this night, before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice. Peter says to him, Even if I must die with thee, I will, no, not deny thee. And likewise also, said all the disciples (Matthew 26:33-35).**

Peter was so confident of his loyalty to Jesus that he disputed with him about stumbling. Peter never turned against Jesus, but he did let his love and zeal for him sometimes cause him to dispute with what Jesus said. Remember how Peter disputed with him when Jesus said he would suffer and be killed by the rulers of the Jews. Peter no doubt thought that he was showing his support for Jesus, but he was actually failing to support him. He was failing because he contradicted what Jesus said.

Moreover, he was trying to prevent Jesus from fulfilling God's will for him; that was the only way Jesus could redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. One lesson for us is to never dispute with anything taught in the word of God, if we want to be truly loyal to him.

Since Peter disputed with Jesus about stumbling, God allowed Peter to be tempted to deny him, which Peter did that very night. There is no record any of the other apostles were tempted that way.

Regarding Peter's denial, according to Matthew, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that in this night, before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice”** (Matthew 26:34). According to Mark, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that thou today, in this night, before a cock sounds twice, will deny me thrice.”** (Mark 14:30). According to Luke, Jesus said, **“I say to thee, Peter, a cock will, no, not sound today, before thou will thrice deny**

that thou know me” (Luke 22:34). And according to John, Jesus said, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, A cock will, no, not sound, until thou will deny me thrice”** (John 13:38).

All four biographers report Jesus saying (1) Peter would deny him, (2) he would deny him before a cock sounded, and (3) he would deny him three times that night. However, Mark reported Jesus saying that Peter would deny him thrice before a cock sounded twice. And in his testimony he does mention a cock sounding twice. He also told how Peter denied Jesus once before a cock sounded the first time. I explain that difference in my comments about Mark’s report of that prophesy.

Jesus prays for deliverance

- **Then Jesus comes with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he says to his disciples, Sit ye here until, after going, I may pray there. And having taken Peter and the two sons of Zebedee [James and John], he began to be sorrowful and distressed. Then Jesus says to them, My soul is deeply grieved, as far as of death. Remain ye here and watch with me.**
- **And having gone forward a little, he fell on his face praying, and saying, My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou** (Matthew 26:36-39).

Jesus felt a powerful dread of that terrible ordeal because it caused him to suffer more than any other man ever had or ever will. And having to endure that ordeal voluntarily was perhaps the most difficult part. Here is a passage from Luke that describes more of the dread he had just before it happened: **“And having become in agony he prayed more intensely, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground”** (Luke 22:44).

The constant abuse he was given, the great fatigue he had to endure, and the extreme pain of being flogged and being nailed and hung on the cross were all insignificant compared with the requirement that he who is the King of kings, Lord of lords, and the very author of life had to allow himself to be humiliated and killed.

Moreover, the man of perfect justice who never sinned had to allow the injustice against him of being put on public display and executed as a criminal. As the author of Hebrews said, Jesus **“endured a cross, having despised the shame ...”** (Hebrews 12:2), which no doubt included being publicly displayed as completely naked.

No degree of suffering by anybody can come close to being as severe as his was—it was truly unique. That was why he was in such agony before it happened. That was why he prayed three separate times, saying, **“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou”** (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Yet he endured it all willingly so that he could become our Redeemer to save our souls, and that was because he loves the Father and he loves us. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

Why Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him when he went to pray, is not told, because the eleven apostles all came to Gethsemane with him. Remember however, those

three apostles were also chosen by him to see his transfiguration on the mountain (see Matthew 17:1-2). And Paul later said those three men were reputed to be pillars of the church (see Galatians 2:9).

His disciples sleep

- **And he comes to the disciples, and finds them sleeping. And he says to Peter, So ye could not watch with me one hour. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak** (Matthew 26:40-41).

Those disciples that Jesus saw sleeping were probably Peter, James, and John, because he took them with him and commanded them to watch while he went to pray. And he chided them because falling asleep on watch is a serious offense. Nevertheless, he was gentle with them because that was an extraordinary time. Those men were very confused and troubled about what Jesus said was going to happen. And in the quiet and darkness of the night they had difficulty keeping themselves awake. As Jesus said about them, **“Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** They wanted to stay awake but their sleepiness overcame them. Who of us has not sometime fallen asleep against his will?

What was the temptation that Jesus warned them against? He was probably speaking of the temptation they would face to forsake him altogether, not just that night. For after Jesus was arrested, the apostles hid themselves for several days to avoid similar treatment by the Jews.

It would have been easier for them to just give up and abandon their faith in Jesus. But they did not do it. They kept together in hiding, not knowing what else to do. For they still did not expect him to rise from the dead and come back to them. They probably thought the rising from the dead he spoke about was his Spirit being taken to heaven.

Nevertheless, his lesson about watching and praying to keep from entering into temptation is applicable to us all. We should never relax our spiritual guard against the threats of temptation. And prayer helps us. We should never lose our faith in the power of prayer.

Jesus again prays for avoidance

- **Having gone again a second time, he prayed, saying, My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me, except I drink it, may thy will happen. And having come again, he finds them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And when he left them, having gone away again, he prayed a third time, saying again the same statement** (Matthew 26:42-44).

There is nothing wrong with continuing to pray to God for the same thing, as long as we accept his decision even when it is against what we ask. Jesus may have uttered more words in his prayer than are quoted here, because he was gone long enough for his disciples to have gone back to sleep. They again fell asleep, even though they no doubt tried to stay awake after he chided them about it.

Notice how Jesus said to his Father, **“... if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me, except I drink it, may thy will happen.”** It was God’s will that Jesus suffer that way

because our salvation was not possible any other way. That was the only way that Jesus could redeem us from being condemned with the devil and the demons.

God can do all things with what he created. But our eternal spirits were not created; we are his offspring, having come from his own Spirit (inherited from Adam). Therefore, the obedient suffering of Jesus was the only way for our salvation. I explain those things much more in my book's *The Law of God before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

His betrayer comes

- **Then he comes to his disciples, and says to them, Sleep what remains, and take rest.**
- **Behold, the hour has come near, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Awake, we go. Behold, he who betrays me has come near. And while he was still speaking, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs from the chief priest and elders of the people (Matthew 26:45-47).**

How long it was between the time Jesus told his disciples to sleep what remains and take rest, and the time that Judas came is not told. Indeed, nothing is said about the times of any of those events, except they happened the night of the Passover feast.

The chief priests and elders of the people sent with Judas a great multitude armed with weapons to arrest Jesus. The exact number of them is not given, but it must have been many times more than Jesus and his eleven apostles. Those rulers must have thought that Jesus and his apostles would resist and fight. And his apostles would have fought if Jesus wanted it. Hence, the rulers sent a great multitude of armed men to be sure Jesus was taken.

Jesus is arrested

- **Now the man who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomever I may kiss is he. Seize him. And straightaway having come to Jesus, he said, Hail, Rabbi, and kissed him much. And Jesus said to him, Friend, why are thou here? Then having come, they threw their hands on Jesus, and seized him (Matthew 26:48-50).**

That passage reveals how hypocritical Judas was. He not only betrayed Jesus by revealing where he could be arrested away from the people, and then leading his enemies to that place, but he even identified Jesus by kissing him. The Greek word for kiss in that passage means to kiss much and not just once, and that is how I translated it. Here is how the other biographers described Judas' involvement in the arrest:

Now he who betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, Whomever I may kiss is he. Seize him, and lead away securely. And when he came, straightaway having approached him, he says, Rabbi, Rabbi, and kissed him much. And they threw their hands on him, and seized him (Mark 14:44-46).

While he yet spoke, behold, a multitude, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them. And he came near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him, Judas, thou betray the Son of man with a kiss? (Luke 22:47-50).

Jesus therefore knowing all the things that were coming upon him, after going forth, he says to them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus says to them, I am he. And Judas, the man betraying him had also stood with them (John 18:4-5).

Notice in Matthew's description how Jesus said to Judas, **"Friend, why are thou here?"** Jesus had prophesied Judas would betray him that night. Why then did he ask Judas why he came there? Remember, although Jesus had prophesied his betrayal, he did not give the reason for it. Which is no doubt why the other apostles thought his betrayal would be accidental. And since all of his apostles were there when he was arrested, Jesus apparently wanted Judas to tell the others why he was betraying him. But Judas never answered.

Regarding why Jesus addressed Judas as friend. I think it was simply a common greeting such as when we address someone we know well as neighbor. For example, saying, "Hello neighbor." Or as the Australians say, "Hello mate."

One apostle uses a sword

- **And behold, one of those with Jesus, having stretched out a hand, drew his sword, and when he struck the bondman of the high priest, he cut off his ear. Then Jesus says to him, Return thy sword into its place, for all those who take a sword will die by a sword.**
- **Or do thou think that I cannot now call my Father, and he will provide to me more than twelve legions of agents? How then would the scriptures be fulfilled that it is necessary to happen this way? (Matthew 26:51-54).**

Jesus' biography by Luke tells why the apostles had a sword with them (see Luke 22:36-38). And his biography by John says that Peter is the one who struck the bondman of the high priest (see John 18:10). Luke also tells how Jesus restored the man's ear (see Luke 22:51).

Jesus would not allow his apostles to defend him by force. Therefore, he commanded them against it. During his trial Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus said to him, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here"** (John 18:36). That is why the church does not use carnal force in its war against evil. For ours is a spiritual war, a war for the hearts and souls of men, not their bodies only. And our weapon is the **"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (Ephesians 6:17). It is the duty of rulers of governments to combat evil with carnal force (see Romans 13:1-6).

Jesus' proverb about living by the sword and dying by the sword probably means that every man who tries to live by violence will suffer violence. For remember, those men who arrested Jesus were not criminals. They were sent to take him by the rulers of the Jews who had legal authority to take and try any man (although no man has the right to

punish the innocent). Remember what Jesus said about them: **“The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not”** (Matthew 23:2-3).

Jesus said he could call upon his Father to provide him with twelve legions of agents. A single agent could have easily save him, but he said those words to emphasize his power to escape from them. A legion in the Roman army was from 3000 to 6000 soldiers. And the number twelve symbolizes completeness. Therefore, God could have sent an overwhelming force that was fully adequate to save him from any threat.

God did not force Jesus to submit to his trial and crucifixion. And no doubt he would have saved Jesus if he had asked him. However, Jesus chose to suffer that way so that he could fully obey God and give us the way of salvation. For that was the only way we could be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins with the devil and the demons.

And that salvation had been prophesied from the beginning. Moreover, his suffering that way had also been prophesied. For Isaiah said about him, **“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth”** (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus shames those who arrested him

- **In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, Did ye come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye did not seize me. But all this has come to pass, so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples fled, having forsook him** (Matthew 26:55-56).

It is obvious that none of those men who were sent from the chief priests and the elders of the Jews believed in him. Otherwise they would not have done it. Jesus shamed those men; not for arresting him, but for the way they came. He made it clear to them that they came in a cowardly way, justifying themselves by acting like he was a criminal. And their rulers were cowards, because they feared to take him publicly.

When Jesus said, **“But all this has come to pass, so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled,”** he was referring to his betrayal and death. Thus, one reason that Jesus submitted himself to that ordeal was that the scriptures might be fulfilled. For Jesus had said, **“... the scripture cannot be broken ...”** (John 10:35). That means every part of the word of God is true, including the fulfillment of every prophecy.

As Jesus had warned his disciples, they all forsook him and fled. (Although they did not abandon their faith in him.) I have heard many men condemn those apostles for that. However, I have absolutely no doubt that every man who ever lived as they had in those circumstances would have done exactly the same thing. Those men forsook him that way in fulfillment of the prophecy, and I have no doubt God did not count that sin against them. Therefore, how can any man be so self-righteous as to stand aloof and condemn them?

Jesus is taken to the high priest

- **And those who seized Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest where the scholars and the elders were assembled together. But Peter followed him from afar, as far as the courtyard of the high priest. And having entered inside, he sat with the subordinates to see the outcome (Matthew 26:57-58).**

All the apostles were scattered, but Peter and John did follow him from a distance. For John's biography of Jesus says, **"And Simon Peter followed Jesus, also the other disciple [John]. But that disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter had stood near the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper and brought in Peter"** (John 18:15-16). Remember, Peter, James, and John were apparently the most worthy of the apostles, and were later called pillars by the church (see Galatians 2:9).

Witnesses against Jesus

- **Now the chief priests and the elders and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death, and they did not find it. And although many false witnesses came, they did not find it.**
- **But finally two false witnesses having come, they said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it by three days (Matthew 26:59-61).**

Those hypocritical rulers tried to justify themselves by putting Jesus on trial, but they could find no evidence to condemn him. Even though they brought false witnesses, none of them gave anything the rulers could use against him. The last two witnesses even misquoted Jesus in their accusation. Jesus had actually said, **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"** (John 2:19). And he was referring to the temple of his body, not the temple of God in Jerusalem.

Jesus acknowledges he is the Christ

- **And the high priest having stood up, he said to him, Answer thou nothing? What do these testify against thee? But Jesus was silent. And having responded, the high priest said to him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus says to him, Thou have said. Nevertheless I say to you, Henceforth ye will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of the sky.**
- **Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, He has blasphemed. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye heard his blasphemy. What does it seem to you? Having answered, they said, He is deserving of death (Matthew 26:62-66).**

In desperation the high priest asked him directly if he was the Christ, the Son of God. And Jesus did not hesitate to say he was. Matthew quoted Jesus responding with the words, **“Thou have said”** (Matthew 26:64), which means yes. Mark quoted Jesus saying, **“I am”** (Mark 14:62). And Luke quotes Jesus saying, **“Ye say that I am”** (Luke 22:70), which also means yes.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke used slightly different words when they quoted Jesus’ answer to the high priest. (John does not report that dialogue.) That is further evidence that in the Bible it is the meaning of what a man says, and not his exact words that are important when he is quoted. That is more evidence to justify translating the Bible to other languages.

Nevertheless, translators do not have the right to paraphrase the Bible record. They are obligated to translate as literally as possible within the limits of the languages. The authors of the Bible were divinely inspired, and therefore had the approval of the Holy Spirit to paraphrase. Translators are not divinely inspired and do not have that approval. The so-called dynamic equivalent method of translating (which means much paraphrasing and loose translating) that is used so frequently in modern translations is a perversion.

When Jesus answered the high priest, he also emphasized his claim by prophesying that they would see him sitting at the right hand of Power, meaning God the Father. And they would see him coming in the clouds of the sky, which refers to the end of the world.

His confession about being the Christ, the Son of God, was enough to condemn him in the sight of those men, because they did not believe him. Therefore, they charged him with blasphemy. They would not even consider any evidence he would offer to prove his claim because their hearts were too hardened and their minds were closed. Remember, they had already judged and condemned him before he was even arrested.

Incidentally, in the Bible when it says a man tore his clothes, that was a sign he was extremely troubled. (Such tears were no doubt at a seam in the cloth so the garment could easily be repaired.) For example, when Jacob saw the evidence suggesting his son Joseph had been killed, the record says, **“And Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days”** (Genesis 37:34).

The beginning of his abuse

- **Then they spat in his face and struck him with a fist. And some slapped him, saying, Prophecy to us, thou Christ. Who is he who struck thee?** (Matthew 26:67-68).

Abusing Jesus that way shows how uncivilized were those rulers of the Jews. No American judge would ever treat a prisoner that way, even when he was found guilty. If any judge did those things he would be impeached, and probably even charged with assault.

Both Mark and Luke say those men covered his face when they demanded he prophesy who struck him (see Mark 14:65 and Luke 22:63). John also says that Jesus had been bound by those who arrested him: **“So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound him ...”** (John 18:12). Binding a prisoner is used against dangerous criminals. Those evil men bound Jesus only to humiliate him.

Peter denies Jesus

- **Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and one servant girl came to him, saying, Thou also were with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied before them all, saying, I do not know what thou say.**
- **And when he was gone out into the porch, another woman saw him, and says to them there, This man was also with Jesus the Nazarene. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.**
- **And after a little while those who stood, having approached, said to Peter, Surely thou also are of them, for thy accent even makes thee apparent.**
- **Then he began to curse vehemently and to swear, I do not know the man. And straightaway a cock sounded. And Peter remembered the saying that Jesus said to him, Before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice. And having gone outside, he wept bitterly (Matthew 26:69-75).**

Peter not only denied him, but he cursed vehemently and swore about it. Nevertheless, that was the only time in his life that Peter ever denied Jesus. And he never lost faith in him. I believe Jesus allowed Peter to be tempted that way because Peter disputed with him. And it was a way to both humble Peter, and teach him that Jesus is never wrong.

After Peter remembered what Jesus said about denying him, he went outside and wept bitterly. He wept bitterly because he did not want to fail Jesus. The weakness of his flesh caused him to stumble. Peter loved Jesus, and he wept bitterly because he failed him. Nevertheless, that experience not only humbled Peter, but it increased his faith in Jesus, so that from that time on he always accepted what Jesus said, even if he did not understand it.

Nazareth was in the province of Galilee. That is why Jesus could be called both a Galilean and a Nazarene. Notice how one of those who accused Peter of being one of Jesus' disciples said his accent made him apparent. Even Americans have different accents for different parts of the country.

Judas repents and hangs himself

- **But having become morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people held consultation against Jesus in order to condemn him to death. And having bound him, they led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.**
- **Then Judas, who betrayed him, after seeing that he was condemned, having repented, he brought back the thirty silver pieces to the chief priests and elders, saying, I sinned, having betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is it to us? See thou to it. And having cast down the silver pieces in the temple, he departed, and after going away, he hanged himself (Matthew 27:1-5).**

Judas had proved himself to be a man unworthy of eternal salvation. Yet he still had enough conscience to repent after he learned that Jesus was condemned. Nevertheless, his

repentance counted for nothing, because Jesus had already cursed whoever betrayed him. For he said, **“The Son of man indeed goes as it is written about him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for him if that man had not been born”** (Matthew 26:24). Judas heard that curse. Yet he betrayed him anyway. Consequently, his later repentance did not save him from that curse.

And that is how it will be on the day of judgment for many souls. They will repent but it will be too late for them, because, like Judas, they had proven themselves unworthy of salvation. For every unrepentant sinner in the world is under the curse of God.

Judas' silver used to buy a potter's field

- **And after taking the silver pieces, the chief priests said, It is not permitted to put them into the treasury, since it is a price of blood. And having held consultation, they bought the potter's field with them for burial for foreigners.**
- **Therefore that field was called the field of blood, to this day. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, which says, And they took the thirty silver pieces, the price of him who was valued, whom they valued from the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me** (Matthew 27:6-10).

Those hypocrites did not care about sending the innocent man Jesus to be crucified, but they worried about putting their blood money in the treasury. Their solution about the money was to purchase the potter's field to bury foreigners. And they no doubt were completely unaware how that fulfilled another prophecy. That prophecy says, **“And I said to them, If ye think good, give me my wage, and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my wage thirty *pieces* of silver. And Jehovah said to me, Cast it to the potter, the good price that I was valued by them. And I took the thirty *pieces* of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of Jehovah”** (Zechariah 11:12-13).

That field was probably called the field of blood for two reasons. One of which was because that field became a grave yard, and the other reason was because the people learned that it had been purchased with the blood money paid Judas to betray Jesus.

Jesus is accused before the governor

- **Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned him, saying, Are thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said to him, Thou say. And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then Pilate says to him, Do thou not hear how many things they testify against thee? And he did not answer him, not even one word, so as for the governor to marvel greatly** (Matthew 27:11-14).

Remember, it was necessary for the rulers of the Jews to persuade the Roman governor to crucify Jesus. For the Romans did not allow them to put any man to death. Therefore, they brought Jesus to him. Matthew does not tell how those rulers accused Jesus, but Luke says, **“And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man perverting the**

nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying himself to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2).

The only thing true about those accusations is Jesus’ claim to be the Christ. And when the governor asked Jesus if he were the king of the Jews, Jesus said **“Thou say,”** which means yes.

Pilate marveled greatly because Jesus did not answer any of the accusations against him. And that was exceedingly unusual, especially among the argumentative Jews. No doubt Pilate was expecting the usual wrangling between disputants, but Jesus would not even deny their charges. He would not be a part of a useless verbal brawl. And I suspect that during the trial the governor developed a greater respect for Jesus and more contempt for the Jews, because Jesus was so much more dignified than his accusers.

The tradition of releasing one prisoner

- **Now during a feast the governor had been accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they wanted** (Matthew 27:15).

The law of Moses commanded the people to have three feasts annually, although the Jews have later added to that number. This particular feast, the Passover feast, was the first one commanded of them.

The Bible says nothing about the origin of the custom to release one prisoner during a feast. It was never part of the law of Moses. Indeed, it was actually against the justice promoted by the law. For there is nothing in the law of Moses about such pardons, although for some things a man could redeem himself with a ransom.

Here is one law about that: **“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death. If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him. Whether it has gored a son, or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him”** (Exodus 21:28-31). Apparently in such a case, the family of the victim was allowed to impose a ransom in place of the death penalty.

However, for crimes like murder and manslaughter (traditionally defined) no ransom could be given: **“Moreover ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And ye shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest”** (Numbers 35:31-32).

Nevertheless, whether just or not the governor agreed to that custom, no doubt to help pacify the Jews during the times of those gathers, which were the most dangerous ones for riots to occur against the Roman occupation.

Jesus or a notorious prisoner

- **And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom do ye want I should release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? For he knew that they delivered him up because of envy (Matthew 27:16-18).**

There were other men who could have been released. But Pilate only gave the Jews the choice of Barabbas or Jesus. He may have thought that Barabbas was so deserving of punishment that the people would choose Jesus instead. Pilate wanted to release Jesus for more reasons than the one his wife gave him (mentioned in the next passage). He knew that Jesus was innocent and was only charged by the rulers of the Jews because they were envious of him. Pilate did have a sense of justice; he was not as ruthless as Herod.

Pilate's wife defends Jesus

- **And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, There is nothing for thee and that righteous man. For I suffered many things this day in a dream because of him (Matthew 27:19).**

The wife of the Roman governor Pilate was obviously much more righteous than the unlawful Jewish wife of Herod who was responsible for beheading John the immerser. How Pilate's wife knew about Jesus is not known. Perhaps she had some friends and servants who were disciples of Christ, and they told her about him.

No details are given about the dream that Pilate's wife had of Jesus, but the record does say she suffered many things in that dream because of him. And she urged her husband to have nothing to do with **"that righteous man."** She meant Pilate should have no part in harming Jesus. However, there is no record she ever became a Christian.

The Bible record does tell how prominent women were among those who either persecuted the church and those who joined with it: **"But the Jews incited the religious women, and the prominent women, and the principle men of the city, and raised up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. And they threw them out of their boundaries"** (Acts 13:50), and, **"And some of them were persuaded, and joined with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great quantity, and of the prominent women not a few"** (Acts 17:4).

The people reject Jesus

- **But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. Now the governor having answered, he said to them, Which of the two do ye want I would release to you? And they said, Barabbas. Pilate says to them, What then shall I do to Jesus who is called Christ? They all say to him, He should be crucified. And the governor said, For what evil has he done? But they cried out even more, saying, He should be crucified (Matthew 27:20-23).**

It is apparent that the chief priests and the elders whipped the multitudes into a frenzy to crucify Jesus. Being in a crowd can often have an almost hypnotic effect on people. And when they are led by the wrong men, crowds can become very irrational and dangerous.

As Solomon said, **“Scoffers set a city in a flame, but wise men turn away wrath”** (Proverbs 29:8). And that seems to have happened there, because the next passage says that an uproar was developing. The greatest guilt, therefore, was upon those chief priests and the elders. Nevertheless, the Jews in that mob were of a base character. For such things by a multitude are never done by righteous men.

It is very sad but true that the general character of the Jews at that time was very low. For they were easily provoked into a frenzy when they were assembled into a multitude. For example, when Paul explained to such a multitude at Jerusalem how Jesus sent him to the hated Gentiles, the record says, **“And they lifted up their voice, saying, Away with such a man from the earth, for he is not fit to live. And of them crying out, and throwing off their garments, and casting dust into the air ...”** (Acts 22:22-23).

That is the kind of hysterical savagery that Christians never do. But that example does help explain how easily their chief priests and elders could manipulate that mob to demand Jesus be crucified.

Jesus is condemned to be crucified

- **And when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather an uproar was developing, after taking water, he washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man. See ye to it.**
- **And having answered, all the people said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then he released Barabbas to them, and having scourged Jesus he delivered him so that he would be crucified** (Matthew 27:24-26).

Pilate saw it was impossible to reason with the multitude; they had become like dangerous animals. Therefore, he released the notorious criminal and sent the innocent man Jesus to be crucified. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he even called him a righteous man. But Pilate was also a spiritually weak man without much character. And to protect himself he sacrificed an innocent man.

Pilate was threatened by the crowd because the rulers at Rome would have been angry with him if he had allowed an uproar to develop, especially about a man who claimed he was king of the Jews. Indeed, the Jews threatened Pilate about that. For the record says, **“From this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend. Every man who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar”** (John 19:12).

According to what I have read about the rulers of the Roman empire, they did not care how their subjects lived, as long as they were peaceful about it. And breaches of the peace were quickly and brutally crushed by their powerful army.

Scourging was probably required for every man condemned to be crucified. For the text says Pilate washed his hands in front of the multitude, and told them he was innocent of

that righteous man. Nevertheless, according to Luke's biography of Jesus, Pilate would have scourged Jesus anyway (to pacify the crowd) if the people had agreed to his release, as this passage says: **"And he said to them a third time, For what evil did this man do? I have found nothing guilty of death in him. I will therefore, having scourged, release him"** (Luke 23:22).

It is commonly taught in these modern times that the Romans crucified Jesus and not the Jews. However, to say that is very deceptive. The Roman governor would not have crucified Jesus if he had a choice, a non-threatening one. Pilate was guilty of having Jesus crucified, but he was much less guilty than the chief priests, and the elders, and the mob of Jews that were there. The Jews, the very people God had chosen to be his own, were those who crucified Jesus the Son of God, and they did it by the hands of the Romans.

The Roman soldiers mock and abuse Jesus

- **Then the soldiers of the governor, having taken Jesus into the Praetorium, gathered the whole band to him. And having stripped him, they put a scarlet robe on him. And having woven a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand.**
- **And having knelt down before him, they ridiculed him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! And having spat upon him, they took the reed and were striking him on his head. And after they ridiculed him, they took the robe off of him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away in order to crucify** (Matthew 27:27-31).

We of the Western World, having been influenced for so long by the Christian way of life, consider the actions of those Roman soldiers to be cruel and barbaric. However, the fact is most of the peoples of the world act that way. For example, every war we have fought in Asia resulted in the brutal treatment of our soldiers when they became prisoners, much worse treatment than what the Roman soldiers did to Jesus.

Putting a scarlet robe on Jesus, a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hand, then kneeling before him, were all done to mock him because he said he was the king of the Jews. In their eyes that was such a ridiculous claim that he deserved being ridiculed that way. I also believe those men enjoyed abusing Jesus, because they had a barbaric spirit. The world contains many men who enjoy being cruel.

It took enormous willpower for Jesus to restrain himself and endure that abuse. Every other man in such a situation is helpless, while Jesus could have stopped them in a moment, and he could have abused them even more severely. But Jesus quietly endured that suffering and humiliation for our sakes. He endured it both because it was God's will for him, and because he loves us. All those things that happened were necessary for him to be able to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

Remember how he prophesied those things would happen, saying to his apostles, **"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scholars. And they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles to ridicule, and to scourge, and to crucify. And the third day he will rise"** (Matthew 20:18-19).

Help carrying Jesus' cross

- **And while coming out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They drafted this man, so that he might take his cross (Matthew 27:32).**

Each condemned prisoner was required to carry his own cross. However, Jesus had been subjected to so much abuse that his body was no longer able to carry it. His spirit was willing but his flesh was made too weak. It was weak because he was beset by the limitations of a body of flesh just like every other man.

Mark says that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Simon was drafted to carry Jesus' cross simply because he happened to be available. We know nothing more about him. There were other men with those names mentioned in the New Testament. Remember, Peter was originally named Simon.

Jesus is crucified

- **And having come to a place called Golgotha, that is called, the place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall. And having tasted it, he would not drink. And when they crucified him, they divided his garments, casting a lot (Matthew 27:33-35).**

Golgotha is also called Skull in Luke 23:33. It is also called Golgotha in John 18:17 which says Golgotha is a Hebrew word. There are many theories that attempt to explain the name, but I will not conjecture about it.

That vinegar was sour wine, and Jesus had said to his apostles, **“But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom”** (Matthew 26:29). Therefore, he would not drink the vinegar.

Crucifying him in the presence of his enemies, and dividing his garments and casting a lot, were all prophesied in this psalm: **“For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evil-doers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot”** (Psalm 22:16-18).

The only possessions Jesus ever had during the time of his ministry were the clothes on his body. And he never required anyone to pay him for anything he did, including his miracles of healing. He accepted food that was offered to him, and temporary lodging, and no doubt also clothing when if needed it, but nothing else.

The book of John says they divided all of his garments except for his tunic. His tunic was a seamless weave, which is why they did not want to divide it, but instead they cast a lot for it (See John 19:23-24). Dividing his garments among them was proof he was crucified naked.

The rulers were able to crucify Jesus because they arrested him away from the temple and those who supported him. They were able because most of the Jews were largely indifferent to Jesus and his preaching about the kingdom of God. That is why the people of Jeru-

salem did not rise up to save him when Jesus was condemned and crucified. You may not be aware that the majority of modern Jews are atheists, including the Israelis.

The inscription over Jesus' head

- **And as they sat, they keep watch over him there. And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then two robbers are crucified with him, one at the right hand and one at the left** (Matthew 27:36-38).

The complete words of the accusation over his head were, **THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS**. We know that the words "the Nazarene" were also there, because they were included in John's record of the accusation (see John 19:19). Remember, it is often necessary to read other passages in order to obtain more complete or detailed knowledge about things in the Bible. Never expect a passage about something in the Bible to always be complete about the subject.

Therefore, beware of false teachers, because they commonly quote one or two passages to justify what they say, when further reading shows their conclusions to be false. Remember how Satan quoted a scripture to tempt Jesus (see Matthew 4:6). If a Bible is available for you, then study it for yourself, because you are going to be judged by what you do.

Matthew says there were two robbers crucified with him, one on each side. However, there is evidence of other men that were being crucified at the same time. I speak more about that in my comments on Luke's record of the crucifixion (see Luke 23).

The observers mock Jesus

- **And those who passed by reviled him, shaking their heads, and saying, Thou who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save thyself. If thou are the Son of God, come down from the cross.**
- **And likewise also the chief priests, ridiculing with the scholars, and elders, and Pharisees, said, He saved others, he cannot save himself. If he is the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God, let him rescue him now, if he wants him, for he said, I am the Son of God. And also the robbers who were crucified with him reviled him the same way** (Matthew 27:39-44).

The psalm that prophesied how they would divide his garments also speaks about how he would be ridiculed and crucified: **"Many bulls have encompassed me. Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me around. They gape upon me with their mouth, as a ravener and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws, and thou have brought me into the dust of death.**

"For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot" (Psalm 22:12-18).

The bulls and the dogs that are mentioned in that psalm were the Jews. And they included the chief priests, the scholars, the elders, and the Pharisees—all rulers of the Jews—as well as those who passed by, and even the robbers who were crucified with him. Indeed, the Bible record indicates that only his apostle John with a few of his women disciples were there with him (see John 19:25-26). His other loyal disciples were not there because of the dangers they faced. For this was a time when the Jews were bolder in their aggression toward his followers. John was safer because he was known to the high priest (see John 18:15).

Matthew does not mention it, but when the rulers of the Jews said in that passage, **“He trusted in God, let him rescue him now, if he wants him”** That was also prophesied in the psalm: **“All those who see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip. They shake the head, saying, He trusted on Jehovah. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, since he delights in him”** (Psalm 22:7-8).

When the rulers of the Jews said that if he came down from the cross they would believe him, they were lying. They were speaking like their father the devil. For nothing that Jesus could do would make those men believe in him. Believing in him means more than recognizing his divinity; it means having faith and trust in him. For James said, **“Thou believe that there is one God, thou do well. The demons also believe, and shudder”** (James 2:19).

The hearts of those rulers were too hardened to ever have faith and trust in Jesus. If he had come down from the cross, they would have claimed it was the power of the devil in him, just as they said about him when he cast out demons (see Matthew 12:24).

Jesus asks God why he forsook him

- **Now from the sixth hour darkness developed over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a great voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?** (Matthew 27:45-46).

The sixth hour in the time of the Jews was noon according to our time, and the ninth hour was 3 PM. The darkness was probably caused by thick clouds. And that darkness probably symbolized the spiritual darkness caused by rejecting God and his will for us. And that rejection was made full by rejecting Jesus Christ the Son of God.

There is controversy about the language used in these words that Jesus spoke: **“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.”** Some say it is Hebrew, some say it is Syriac, and some say it is neither. And whether it was understood by the spectators is not clear either. For some said he was calling for Elijah, which does not seem to make much sense if they understood what he actually said.

The question Jesus asked God was for our sake not for his. It is a question that we should all seek to answer: Why did God forsake his only begotten Son on the cross? He forsook him to be crucified so that Jesus could qualify to become our Redeemer and save our souls. That is why Jesus allowed himself to be there.

God forsook his Son to be crucified, but he never departed from him. For Jesus said to his apostles at the time of the last supper, **“Behold, the hour comes, and now has come, that**

ye will be scattered, each man to his own things, and ye will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32).

Bringing vinegar to Jesus

- **And some of those who stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calls Elijah. And straightaway one of them, after running, and having taken a sponge, and having filled it with vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. But the others said, Leave thou be. We might see if Elijah comes he will save him (Matthew 27:47-49).**

They thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save him because Elijah was taken up directly into heaven without having ever died. And the Old Testament says that God would send Elijah back to the people: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6). However, Jesus said that prophecy applied to John the immerser (see Matthew 11:14), who came in the spirit of Elijah, not Elijah himself.

The vinegar was sour wine. When the passage says he gave him to drink, that means Jesus merely tasted what it was. For remember, Jesus had earlier said to his apostles, **“But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”** (Matthew 26:29). Therefore, he did not drink it.

The man brought vinegar to Jesus because John reported Jesus saying **“I thirst”** (John 19:28). However, why the man brought vinegar to drink is not clear. Perhaps the vinegar contained enough alcohol in it to provide some relief from the pain. If that is the case, then the man was being compassionate toward Jesus.

Some of them wanted to see if Elijah would come and save him. Remember, when Jesus cried out in a great voice some of the spectators thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save him.

Jesus yields up his spirit

- **And Jesus, having cried out again in a great voice, yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks split, and the sepulchers were opened, and many bodies of the sanctified who have been asleep arose. And having come forth out of the sepulchers after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared to many (Matthew 27:50-53).**

What Jesus said when he cried out again in a great voice was probably the same words, **“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani,”** although the record does not tell. Whatever he said were his last words before he died, which is what happens when our spirit is yielded up. His body of flesh perished, but not his divine spirit. And so it is with every man when he dies. For when Solomon was describing how we age and die, he said, **“... and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

When Jesus perished, that completed his life of perfect sacrifice in obedience to the Father. It only remained (1) for Jesus to be resurrected the third day, (2) for him to appear to his apostles and some of his disciples as proof of his resurrection, (3) for him to give authority for his apostles to establish the kingdom (the church), (4) to ascend into heaven in the sight of many of his disciples, and (5) then to reign over all things with the Father at his right hand.

That curtain of the temple was no doubt the one that separated the holy place from the most holy place (also called the holy of holies). The most holy place was where the ark of the covenant was kept. Only the high priest was allowed in there, and that was only for one day per year bringing blood of animal sacrifices, which was on the day of atonement. Only the priests were allowed in the holy place, but they went in there every day of the year.

Christians are now the priests of God, and the new holy place is the church. Christ is our high priest, and heaven is now the most holy place. And the torn curtain symbolizes our access to heaven through the blood of Christ, which access we enter when we too are resurrected to the afterlife. The book of Hebrews tells much more about those things.

The earthquake may have symbolized God's anger at the world for rejecting his Son, because the book of Revelation says things like that will happen to sinners at the end of the world. The sepulchers being opened and bodies of the sanctified being raised was also symbolic. Although I have no doubt that literally happened, it probably symbolized the resurrection of our spirit with Christ at the end of the world.

The passage says many of those who arose from the sepulchers entered into the holy city (from the cemeteries) and appeared to many. The sepulchers of those people were opened when he perished, but they were not resurrected until after Jesus himself was resurrected. Nothing more is said about that amazing event. It must have been an astonishing but very joyful discovery by their loved ones when they appeared to them. I can imagine how I would have felt. Those resurrected souls probably lived out their lives in the normal way. For they no doubt all eventually perished and were buried again.

Scoffers laugh at such reports, calling them myths believed only by fools. But they themselves are shortsighted fools, ignorant of the power of our God. As Paul said to king Agrippa when he was defending himself against the false accusations of the Jews, **"Why is it judged incredible with you, if God raises the dead?"** (Acts 26:8). For Almighty God can do anything. And the fact he created this entire universe and all things in it is logical evidence that he can do anything. For the theory of evolution is too illogical, too ridiculous, and much more incredible than God raising the dead.

Therefore, when the word of God reports such things, however fantastic they seem, we believe the events are true because our God can do anything. And those who genuinely love and trust him believe nothing is impossible for him. Such things enable God to separate those who are worthy to become his sons for eternity from those who are not.

The centurion was convinced about Jesus

- **Now the centurion, and those with him watching over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God** (Matthew 27:54).

If the centurion and those with him, who were watching over Jesus, feared greatly when they saw the earthquake, and the things that happened, surely everyone there must have feared greatly. It must have been a terrifying sight, similar to what happened at mount Sinai when Jehovah spoke to the people. For the book of Hebrews say about that experience, **“And so fearful was that which was made visible, that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling”** (Hebrews 12:21).

The chief priests and the other rulers of the Jews had probably departed from the area before that happen. Nevertheless, they too must have feared greatly, because the darkened sky and the earthquake were not limited to where Jesus was crucified.

That centurion and those with him witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, which means they saw many of the things that happened. And it so impressed them that the centurion believed Jesus must have been the Son of God. The Gentiles believed in many gods. And they believed that the gods sometimes interacted with the affairs of the world. Greek mythology contains many such stories. Therefore, it is not surprising that the centurion was convinced. His heart was obviously not hardened against Jesus. And so, unlike the rulers of the Jews, he could objectively judge those events.

Indeed, that humble Roman soldier was more righteous than all of those rulers of the Jews, because Luke says about him, **“... he glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was righteous”** (Luke 23:47). He was obviously not among the soldiers that mocked Jesus. There is always a minority of people in most walks of life who love justice and righteousness. That Roman soldier was one of them because he judged Jesus rightly. And we can only hope that he eventually became a disciple of Christ.

The women who watched the crucifixion

- **And many women were there watching from afar, who followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee** (Matthew 27:55-56).

Although the Bible record focuses on the apostles of Jesus, there were many women who followed him from Galilee serving him during his ministry. Matthew mentions three of them who were watching when Jesus died.

There were others who had been there, including his mother Mary. They may have departed before the end because it was too grievous for them to keep watching him die on the cross. Apparently, only Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (the apostles James and John) remained until the end.

The men disciples were not there because they were in much more danger from the Jews than the women were. For with Jesus being condemned to crucifixion the Jews were much bolder in their persecution of the disciples, especially of his apostles. The enemies of Jesus could now attack them in the absence of the multitudes that were always around Jesus. Only the apostle John was at the crucifixion because he was known by the high priest, and consequently was less vulnerable to attack.

I suspect the rulers of the Jews wanted the population to think Jesus was condemned and crucified by the Romans so that the Romans would get the blame. Thus, exonerating the rulers of the Jews from any responsibility. Such a deception is still being promoted even in modern times. For it is only in the Bible record that the truth is proclaimed. Examine what the world thinks, and you will see.

Jesus is buried

- **And having become evening, there came a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was discipled by Jesus. This man having come to Pilate, requested the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given.**
- **And Joseph having taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new sepulcher, which he hewed out in the rock. And having rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, he departed. And Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb (Matthew 27:57-61).**

Mark's biography of Jesus says that Joseph of Arimathaea was **"an honorable council-man who also himself was awaiting the kingdom of God ..."** (Mark 15:43). That sepulcher was an artificial cave created by Joseph. During Bible times both natural and artificial caves were commonly used as sepulchers. For example, the Bible says **"Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan"** (Genesis 23:19).

That passage in Matthew says Joseph of Arimathaea was discipled by Jesus. And as Jesus had said to his disciples, it was not easy for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (see Matthew 19:23). It not only took strong character for Joseph to become a disciple, but it took great courage for him to bury Jesus in his own new sepulcher. It took courage because the rulers of the Jews learned about it.

Apparently only two of the women who were there when Jesus died saw his burial at the tomb: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of James and Joses). They all loved Jesus greatly, but not all of them wanted to stay to see him die and be buried that way. I suspect it was too emotionally overwhelming for them to endure.

The Jews guard Jesus' tomb

- **Now on the morrow, which is after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was still alive, After three days I am raised. Command therefore to secure the tomb until the third day, lest his disciples having come by night steal him away, and say to the people, He was raised from the dead. And the last error will be worse than the first.**

- **Pilate said to them, Ye have security. Go, make it as secure as ye know how. And having gone, they made the tomb secure, with the security having sealed the stone** (Matthew 27:62-66).

The day of Preparation was Friday because the law of Moses forbade food preparation on the sabbath. That means those rulers came to Pilate on the day of the sabbath. And they did things they would probably have condemned Jesus for doing if he had done them, such as securing the tomb.

That passage also indicates those chief priests and Pharisees understood exactly what Jesus meant when he said he would be raised the third day. And they were so fearful of the movement he had started that they wanted to be sure his disciples could not claim his resurrection. Notice how the chief priests and the Pharisees called Jesus “that deceiver.” And when we proclaim the truth of Christ, we can expect his enemies to call us deceivers as well.

Those rulers may have agreed to let Joseph bury Jesus in his tomb so that they could prevent his disciples from stealing the body and claiming he was raised. Therefore, they wanted it guarded. Those rulers may have asked Pilate to send Roman soldiers to guard the tomb because that would have made it more secure. However, Pilate was in no mood to accommodate them. Hence, he commanded them to send their own security detail.

What the passage means when it says they sealed the stone is not clear. They must have done something to it to show whether the stone had been moved. That way they could be sure the body of Jesus had been undisturbed. Some have suggested that act served God by protecting the body of Jesus until he was resurrected, and it also gave further evidence of the later miracle when he did rise.

About Jesus' resurrection

There were many other things that happened during the time of his resurrection. Each of the four biographies of Jesus give their own individual accounts, all of which vary about some things. I put all of what they testified together in a summary, which you can read in my commentary of John's biography of him (see John 20).

An agent of the Lord rolls away the stone

- **Now late on the sabbath day, being dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, a great earthquake occurred. For an agent of the Lord, having descended from heaven, having come, he rolled the stone away from the door and sat upon it. And his appearance was as lightning and his clothing white as snow. And those watching over shook from fear of him, and became as dead men** (Matthew 28:1-4).

The passage says that those women came late on the sabbath day. That means they *began* going to the sepulcher because they were forbidden to anoint his body on the sabbath. And indeed, the report in John says, “**Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene comes early, while it was still darkness, to the sepulcher ...**” (John 20:1). That means

they *arrived* at the sepulcher on the first day of the week. Also what John means is that Mary Magdalene began to go to the tomb while it was still darkness, very early on the first day of the week. For Mark says she came near to the sepulcher **“when the sun was risen”** (Mark 16:2).

From the wording of that passage in Matthew the agent of the Lord may have used that great earthquake to roll the stone away from the door of the tomb instead of the force of his body. And he probably sat upon the stone so that the security detail could see him clearly.

The text says the agent had the appearance of lightning, with his clothing white as snow. Such an awesome sight of that agent of heaven caused the men in the security detail who were guarding the tomb to shake from fear and become as dead men. Becoming as dead men means they were paralyzed and unable to move. Great fear can do that to people.

Here is a more detailed description of an agent of the Lord given by the prophet Daniel: **“I lifted up my eyes, and looked. And, behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with pure gold of Uphaz. Also his body was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as flaming torches, and his arms and his feet like burnished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude”** (Daniel 10:4-6).

The women learn Jesus was raised

- **And having responded, the agent said to the women, Fear ye not, for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he was raised as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And after going quickly, tell his disciples, He was raised from the dead, and lo, he goes before you into Galilee. There ye will see him. Behold, I have told you** (Matthew 28:5-7).

The agent wanted the men guarding the tomb to fear and become paralyzed, but he told the women to fear not. And I believe that is going to happen in the afterlife: sinners will shake with fear and become paralyzed when they see Christ, but we will be assured and welcomed warmly. The agent of the Lord even showed the women where Jesus had lain before he was raised from the dead.

He then commanded them to go quickly, inform his disciples that Jesus was raised from the dead, and Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee where they would see him. During the last supper Jesus told his apostles that after his resurrection he would go ahead of them into Galilee: **“But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee”** (Matthew 26:32).

Those instructions from the agent must have been for all of his disciples who could be informed. Because the Bible record tells how Jesus appeared to some of his disciples, including his apostles, before they went to Galilee.

Notice how the agent emphasized his words, by saying, **“Behold, I have told you.”** Those women needed that emphasis because of the great emotional shock of that experience. And under such emotional circumstances like that it is common for people to forget some of the things they are told.

Jesus appears to the women

- **And after coming out quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, they ran to notify his disciples. And as they were going to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus also met them, saying, Hail. And having come, they held his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus says to them, Fear not. Go notify my brothers that they should depart into Galilee, and there they will see me** (Matthew 28:8-10).

Although their vision of that heavenly agent brought fear to them, what he said brought them great joy. So much so that they did not walk, but they ran to notify his disciples. They were charged with energy from what they had heard and experienced. And then to crown it all, Jesus himself met them with a greeting. Those faithful women were the first ones who saw him after his resurrection. They knew it was truly Jesus, and in their humility and reverence they held his feet and worshiped him. They did not presume to embrace him. Yet obviously they could not resist holding on to him, because they love him so much.

Jesus also assured them not to fear, and he uttered the same command the agent had given to them. His brothers would see him in Galilee. The brothers of Jesus means all of his faithful disciples. Remember what he had said to the people: **“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And having stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, he said, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in the heavens, he is my brother, and sister, and mother”** (Matthew 12:48-50).

The chief priests start a false rumor

- **Now while they were going** [the women who first witnessed his resurrection], **behold, some of the security having come into the city, reported to the chief priests all the things that happened. And after assembling with the elders, and having taken consultation, they gave many silver pieces to the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples, having come by night, stole him from us while we slept.**
- **And if this should be heard by the governor, we will persuade him, and will make you worry free. And having taken the silver pieces, they did as they were instructed. And this saying was spread abroad among the Jews until this day** (Matthew 28:11-15).

That is just more evidence to indicate how ruthless those chief priests and elders of the Jews were. They used the same kind of devices that the devil and his disciples commonly use, such as deceit and bribery to conceal the truth.

One of the ten commandments says, **“Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor”** (Exodus 20:16). And those soldiers violated that commandment. They not only bore false witness against those who testified of Jesus’ resurrection, but they also bore false witness against the heavenly agent who was there. And the chief priest and elders bribed them to do it. Those soldiers who agreed to conceal the truth were just as guilty as the chief priests and the elders who bribed them to lie about what happened.

The passage says “... **this saying was spread abroad among the Jews until this day.**” That means it was proclaimed long after the church was established. And that slander against those who witnessed his resurrection is still being uttered. False testimony like that has helped keep men from believing the truth about Jesus Christ and his good news for us.

Those soldiers were not worried about offending God by violating one of the ten commandments, but they were concerned about the governor hearing they had slept on watch. Sleeping on watch by guards is a very serious offense. However, those rulers of the Jews assured them they would make the soldiers “worry free.” That means they would prevent the governor from punishing them. Nevertheless, God will punish them and all like them much worse in the day of judgment.

Jesus was given all authority

- **But the eleven disciples went for Galilee to the mountain where Jesus arranged for them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but men doubted. And Jesus having come, he spoke to them, saying, All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me (Matthew 28:16-18).**

God the Father gave all authority in heaven and on earth to his Son Jesus Christ because he proved himself worthy of it. For he alone lived in this evil world without sin. And by his perfect obedience he earned the right to redeem all who belong to him from the condemnation of their sins.

Therefore, my heart leaps for joy, not only because he has redeemed us from condemnation, but that he has been given all authority. There is absolutely nobody (besides God the Father himself) I would rather have to rule over me. For there is nobody who has proven himself to be more worthy, nor who has sacrificed more to prove his love for us.

Matthew does not say who the men were that doubted and why they doubted. His words suggest some of the disciples were still not fully convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Perhaps the idea that the Christ would live and die that way seemed too fantastic to them, because the Jews had an entirely different concept of what the Christ and the kingdom of God would be like.

The Great Commission

- **After going, make ye disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you. And lo, I am with you all the days, until the end of the age. Truly (Matthew 28:19-20).**

That command is for all of Jesus’ disciples, and not just for his apostles. It would not have been possible for his apostles to make disciples of all the nations. Of course, that does not mean each of us must be a full time evangelist. It means that each of us should look for occasions when we can testify about Jesus, and encourage others to follow him. And we are to be “**wise as serpents, and innocent as doves**” (Matthew 10:16) in how we do it.

And when we find receptive souls who will believe and obey, then they are to be immersed in water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That gives them their new life in the body of Christ, which is the church.

Whether we are to literally utter the **“the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** when we immerse them or not is doubtful. For Peter said to the Jews who asked him what they should do about Jesus, he said to them, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). And in the house of Cornelius the centurion, Peter said, **“Can any man forbid the water for these not to be immersed, who have received the Holy Spirit as we also? And he commanded them to be immersed in the name of the Lord”** (Acts 10:47-48).

We should definitely immerse repentant believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but what we utter over them probably depends upon various circumstances; such as Peter’s reply to the Jews, which only mentioned the name of Jesus Christ, and how Peter commanded Cornelius and his household to be immersed, which only mentioned the name of the Lord. Nevertheless, when in doubt then utter all of their names: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Notice also how Jesus said we were to teach them to observe all things, as many as he commanded us. Salvation by faith only is a false doctrine. We must obey all of his commandments, and the testimony of the New Testament is our only reliable source of information about what he commanded us.

The last words that Jesus spoke to them, as recorded in Matthew, was his promise to be with us always, even until the end of the world. He is always with us as long as we remain faithful to him. He is with us in spirit. We cannot see such things with our eyes, but we can know them with our heart. I have written much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

A Commentary on The Biography of Jesus by Mark

Regarding Mark's authorship of this biography of Jesus, information about it is widely available, and so I will not comment about it. Suffice to say the great majority of scholars agree that Mark was the author.

There are many things written in Mark's biography of Jesus that are also recorded in Matthew's biography of him. Modern Bible critics claim Matthew borrowed those things from Mark's biography. But those men are just guessing because they have no evidence except for the similarities. Men love to make such hypotheses to attract attention to themselves and be thought of as especially smart. Their motives are not for truth but selfish ambition.

The truth, of which I have no doubt, is that both of those biographies, as well as the other two (by Luke and John), are based upon the common knowledge of factual evidence and reliable testimony that was available to them from many witnesses, and they were written independently. Otherwise they would have said so, because they were honest men.

None of those biographers copied from any of the writings of the others. Their biographies of Jesus were all based upon the same testimony about him that was available to whoever sought it. The truth about Jesus Christ was not something his witnesses wanted hidden. They were all without doubt eager to share what they knew about him. And what differences there are in the four biographies that we have are simply a result of what the Holy Spirit determined they should be. For it was the Spirit of God that guided the writings that we have in the Holy Bible.

Many of the comments I make here in this biography of Jesus are what I said about the same events that are recorded in the other three biographies of him.

John the immerser begins to preach

- **The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my agent before thy face, who will prepare thy way before thee. The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.**
- **It came to pass, that John was immersing in the wilderness and preaching an immersion of repentance for remission of sins. And all the land of Judea and the Jerusalemites went out to him, and they were all immersed by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and eating locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:1-6).**

The prophecy mentioned in that passage is from Isaiah. It says, **"The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places**

smooth. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God sent John the immerser to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Christ. And that preparation included repentance, which meant the people turning away from their sins. The valleys being filled and the mountains and hills being brought low symbolize the removal of the obstacles in the hearts of the people to receiving the good news of Christ. And the crooked things being straightened and the rough made smooth symbolize the hearts of the people rejecting sin for righteousness, the righteousness of the kingdom of God that came through Christ.

John was a very rugged man who lived in the wilderness of Judea away from civilization. He dressed in rustic clothing, and he wore a leather belt, which was a masculine item of apparel. He obtained his nutrition from two of the things that the wilderness contained: locusts and honey. Eating locusts does not sound very appetizing to us. But they were listed among the clean foods in the law of Moses (see Leviticus 11:22). And I am told they are very nutritious and not unpleasant to eat.

Instead of going to population centers John preached in the wilderness. And he apparently relied upon word of mouth to attract listeners. He commanded the people to repent of their sins. And he said the kingdom of God has approached, which was all the more reason why the people should repent; they needed to prepare themselves for that kingdom.

John was no doubt a very dynamic speaker because all the people from a wide area came out to him. They confessed their sins, and he immersed them in the Jordan river. However, not all who came to hear him were willing to confess their sins and be immersed. John was apparently the first man to introduce the ritual of being immersed upon confession of sins. Secular historians claim the ritual is older than John. However, their claims are based upon washing for cleanliness rather than being fully immersed for repentance.

John and Jesus Christ

- **And he preached, saying, A man mightier than I comes after me of whom I am not worthy, having stooped down, to loosen the strap of his shoes. I indeed immersed you in water, but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit** (Mark 1:7-8).

Although John was a strong and impressive man he was still very humble. And he confessed that the man coming after him was much greater than he. Remember, John's mission was to prepare the people for the coming Christ. And John wanted the people to know that the coming Christ was a much greater man.

The Holy Spirit is only mentioned three times in the Old Testament, and for each of those times the word holy seems to be a descriptive adjective and not part of a name. Here is one of those passages: **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me”** (Psalm 51:10-11).

However, the Holy Spirit is mentioned ninety-two times in the New Testament, and each of those times the word holy is part of a name. That is why it is conventional in translations to capitalize the first letters of the words Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

There is much that is mysterious about the Holy Spirit. And I devote an entire chapter about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I will only say here that the Holy Spirit seems to be a special force that is part of God himself, but also has an individual identity. Jesus was begotten from God, but nothing is said about the Holy Spirit ever being begotten. Jesus also has an individual identity, but unlike the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not part of God himself. He is a separate being, having been begotten from God.

John said the one coming after him (the Christ) would immerse the people in the Holy Spirit. Which probably means that special force would engulf them. For Paul said to his brothers in Corinth, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?”** (First Corinthians 6:19). That special force from God resides in our bodies as soon as we become a Christian. It is a gift from God when we become a disciple of his Son Jesus Christ. As Peter said in his first sermon to the Jews, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38).

Sinners cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). That helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit.

John immerses Jesus

- **And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was immersed by John in the Jordan. And straightaway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens divided, and the Spirit descending upon him as a dove. And a voice occurred out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased** (Mark 1:9-11).

John was immersing for repentance, but Jesus had no need for repentance because he never sinned. Nevertheless, Jesus was still immersed so that he could become an example for us, an example to do righteous things even when they are not required. For doing good things beyond what is merely necessary is a fulfillment of righteousness. That is why it is so sad that most people who believe in Christ, refuse to be immersed for the remission of their sins. They think it is unnecessary, even though Jesus commanded it. If they had the spirit of Christ in them they would submit to immersion even if they thought it was unnecessary.

Such people are going to have no excuses when they face the day of judgment, because Jesus said, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:16). And Jesus himself was immersed even though it was not required of him. It is significant that only after Jesus was immersed did the voice come from heaven and praise him, saying, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”** Jesus went beyond what was required for righteousness, and that is one reason

God was well pleased with him. Jesus said many other things about going beyond what is required when he taught his disciples in his sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5).

Notice how the Spirit of God did not appear in that situation as a mighty power when he spoke, but instead he appeared as a gentle dove. When the Spirit of God spoke that way it contrasted greatly from the time God spoke to the people of Israel from mount Sinai. For the book of Exodus says, **“And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die”** (Exodus 20:18-19).

God showed himself gentle through his Son Jesus, who is also called the Lamb of God. God has both a gently side and a fierce side. His gentle side is for the sheep of God that Jesus came to save. For Jesus said to the Jews who were rejecting him, **“But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:26-28). I say much more about those things in my commentary about that passage.

Jesus is tempted in the wilderness

- **And straightaway the Spirit drives him forth into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild beasts. And the agents served him** (Mark 1:12-13).

In order to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, and to prove that sin is not inevitable, it was necessary for Jesus to experience temptations without ever sinning. Regarding his temptations, in the example of prayer that Jesus gave his disciples, he said, **“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...”** (Matthew 6:13). And Jesus said to his apostles on the night of his betrayal, **“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (Matthew 26:41).

Why then would the Spirit of God drive Jesus forth into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan? The reason is that Jesus needed to be tested severely so that nobody could claim he was sinless only because he was not tempted sufficiently.

Remember, it was the Spirit of God that drove Jesus forth into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. And Jesus was no doubt alone there. Therefore, God sent his agents from heaven to serve Jesus, because after the forty days his body was in a very weakened condition. For Matthew says he fasted those forty days (see Matthew 4:2). Indeed, he may not even have been able to walk out of the wilderness without being helped. God subjected Jesus to many trials and tribulations, but he never abandoned him. And God will never abandon us in our trials and tribulations as long as we remain faithful to him.

Jesus begins to preach

- **Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent ye, and believe in the good news** (Mark 1:14-15).

In Matthew's biography of him it says, **"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached"** (Matthew 4:17). In both books Jesus commands men to repent. In Mark's biography of him Jesus commands men to also believe in the good news. In Matthew's biography of Jesus the reason he gave to repent was because the kingdom of the heavens had approached. Of course, that is not the only reason to repent. Repentance was apparently proclaimed that way because it is the first step required to become part of the kingdom God, which on the earth is the church. Remember, the kingdom of the heavens is the same as the kingdom of God.

Jesus begins to call his apostles

- **And walking beside the sea of Galilee he saw Simon and Andrew his brother, the son of Simon, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, Come ye behind me, and I will make you to become fishermen of men. And straightaway they left the nets, and followed him.**
- **And having advanced a little from there he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And straightaway he called them. And having left their father Zebedee in the boat with the workmen, they went behind him** (Mark 1:16-20).

The biographies of Jesus by Luke and John explain more about why those men followed him. It was not simply because he called them to become fishermen of men. He gave them sufficient evidence about himself. And he has given us all ample evidence to follow him. That evidence is contained in the testimony of the New Testament record.

Being fishermen of men means taking men out of the sea of sin and making them a part of the kingdom of God. And that is done by persuading them with preaching to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, be immersed in water for the remission of them, and live a life of righteousness in obedience to Christ.

Jesus taught with authority

- **And they entered into Capernaum, and straightaway on the sabbath day, having entered into the synagogue, he taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as having authority, and not as the scholars** (Mark 1:21-22).

Capernaum was a city on the north shore of the sea of Galilee. Jesus entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day because that is where the Jews assembled to worship God and study the scriptures. He taught them because he was filled with knowledge and wisdom, and that was his major mission in the world: to teach the people his good news of their salvation.

The people were astonished because they had never heard a man teach them with such authority. For the Jews were under the law of Moses, and Jesus was teaching things differently. In his sermon on the mount, several times Jesus said to them, **"Ye have heard that it was said But I say to you ..."** (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Jesus deliberately

contrasted his teachings with the law of Moses, although he never taught anything against the law. Their scholars taught them what the law of Moses commanded, but Jesus taught what he commanded; he taught with authority.

The Jews did add many traditions and laws to those of Moses, which they call the “oral law.” However, those additions were all endorsed by the chief priests and elders. They were not added by itinerant preachers like Jesus. Nor were they added by the scholars without first being endorsed by the chief priests and elders.

The oral laws of the Jews are actually violations of the law of Moses, because Moses said, **“Whatever thing I command you, that shall ye observe to do. Thou shall not add to it, nor diminish from it”** (Deuteronomy 12:32). The only exception Moses gave was the coming of the Christ. For he said to the sons of Israel, **“Jehovah thy God will raise up for thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brothers, like me. Ye shall hearken to him ...”** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The Jews not only disobeyed the command against adding or diminishing the laws of Moses, but they disobeyed the command to hearken to the prophet like Moses that God sent to them. Jesus was like Moses in being a law giver who had the power to perform miracles. And Jesus brought us the new law of God, called a law of liberty (see James 1:25).

Casting out an unclean spirit

- **And a man was in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, Oh no! What is with us and with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Did thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou are, the Holy man of God.**
- **And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be thou muzzled, and come out of him. And the unclean spirit, having convulsed him and having cried in a great voice, came out of him.**
- **And they were all amazed, so as to question among themselves, saying, What is this? What is this new doctrine, that he commands with authority, and the unclean spirits also obey him? And his fame went forth straightaway into the entire region around Galilee (Mark 1:23-28).**

Unclean spirits are also called evil spirits and demons, and they are very mysterious creatures. For example, some of them cause a man to act very wildly; some of them cause epilepsy; some of them cause deafness. The above passage does not say what the evils were that the unclean spirit caused in this man.

All of the unclean spirits that saw Jesus recognized him as the Son of God, which suggests to me that they had been cast down from heaven where they knew him. They were cast down because they corrupted their spirits into uncleanness. And they all hated Jesus, and wanted nothing to do with him. They also feared him, because they knew he had the power to destroy them. And in this case the unclean spirit even asked Jesus if that was what he was going to do.

When the unclean spirit said, **“Did thou come to destroy us?”** He spoke in the plural, which meant he was asking Jesus if he was going to destroy all of the unclean spirits. Mat-

threw records when one demon asked Jesus if he was going to destroy them before the time (see Matthew 8:29). That “time” may mean either the end of the world, or the beginning of the thousand year reign of Christ in the world when Satan is bound and cast into the abyss (see Revelation 20:1-7).

When Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man, the spirit convulsed him and cried out in a great voice. Other examples show that unclean spirits do not like to leave the bodies of those they possess. Spirits without bodies are naked, and nakedness is always associated with weakness and vulnerability. It is also associated with shame, but unclean spirits are shameless creatures anyway.

The power that Jesus had over unclean spirits astonished the people because they had never seen anything like it. Consequently, his fame spread widely in the entire region around Galilee, which is where he first began his ministry.

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law

- **And straightaway, when they came forth out of the synagogue they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's mother-in-law lay feverish, and straightaway they tell him about her. And upon coming, having taken hold of her hand, he raised her up and the fever left her. And straightaway she served them** (Mark 1:29-31).

Simon was also called Peter, because Mark later tells how Jesus gave Simon that new name (see Mark 3:16). Nothing is ever said about Peter's marriage, or anything about his wife. Indeed, the Bible says nothing about any of the wives of the apostles. We know not how many were married, nor anything about who the women were. We do know that Paul never married, because he indicated that in some of his letters. Nothing is ever said about Peter's father-in-law either, although his father Jonah is mentioned elsewhere (see John 1:42).

Notice how Peter's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus as soon as she was healed. She was obviously a righteous woman eager to serve others.

Jesus heals many

- **And having become evening when the sun set they brought to him all who were faring badly, and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together near the door. And he healed many who were faring badly with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he did not allow the demons to speak, because they had recognized him** (Mark 1:32-34).

According to the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia, Capernaum had a population of about 1500. Mark says the whole city gathered together near the door. Jesus must not have made himself available until evening, because that is when they brought people for him to heal. And he always healed them.

Jesus did not allow the demons to speak. Of course, the only way they could speak was through the mouth of whomever they possessed. Nevertheless, Jesus forbade them because they knew who he was. And Jesus did not want to be announced that way. He had his own time and way to declare who he was.

Jesus needed to preach in many places

- **And having risen early, very much in the night, he came out and departed into a desolate place, and prayed there. And Simon and those with him searched for him. And having found him, they say to him, All are seeking thee.**
- **And he says to them, Let us go into the nearby towns, so that I may preach there also. For I came forth for this. And he was preaching in their synagogues in all Galilee, and casting out the demons (Mark 1:35-39).**

The Bible mentions several times how Jesus sought privacy to pray, which was often after nightfall or before dawn. Communities sometimes urged Jesus to leave, and sometimes they urged him to stay, usually depending upon what he did and the character of the community.

This was a good village because they were not offended by his preaching, and they wanted him to stay. However, the mission of Jesus required him to preach to many people throughout Israel, because Jesus said, **“For I came forth for this.”** Although he began his ministry in Galilee, and he was preaching in the synagogues there, he did not remain just in Galilee.

Jesus heals a leper

- **And a leper comes to him beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying to him, If thou wilt thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, having felt compassion, having reached out his hand, he touched him, and says to him, I will, be thou clean. And after he spoke, straightaway the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.**
- **And having strictly warned him, straightaway he sent him out. And he says to him, See thou say nothing to any man, but go, show thyself to the priest, and bring for thy cleansing the things that Moses commanded for a testimony to them (Mark 1:40-44).**

Jesus sometimes refused requests made of him, but he never refused to heal a sick man. The law of Moses required lepers to live apart, and to cry out the word “unclean” when people were coming near them (see Leviticus 13:45). In the law of Moses touching a leper made a man unclean. Nevertheless, Jesus touched the leper when he made him clean. Jesus was the Son of God who lived without sin. He could not be made unclean that way because he had the power to make those who were unclean become clean.

The command about going to the priest, that Jesus gave to the healed man, was a requirement of the law of Moses whenever a leprous man was healed (see Leviticus 14). One of the duties of the priests was to verify if someone or something was unclean. And the priests were also to verify if what had been unclean became clean. The law of Moses emphasized cleanliness, especially with dead flesh and skin diseases. Those ancient peoples knew nothing of germs in those days, but God always has. Therefore, he gave them such laws to help protect them.

The leper disobeys him

- **But having gone out, he began to proclaim it much, and to spread abroad the matter, so as for him to no longer be able to enter openly into a city, but was outside in desolate places. And they came to him from all directions** (Mark 1:45).

That leper probably thought he was doing people a great favor by spreading abroad how he had been healed. But in so doing he added a great burden to Jesus. For because of it Jesus was no longer able to enter openly into a city because they would surround him with sick people.

Remember, the primary mission of Jesus was to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. The healing he did had to be secondary, and not interfere with that primary mission. Also remember, in his body of flesh it was impossible for Jesus to heal all the sick. If God wanted them all healed he could do it immediately from his throne in heaven.

What that leper did is very characteristic of sinners; they think their way is better than God's way. Although Jesus commanded against it, that leper thought he was helping people by spreading abroad the matter. Like all sinners his perspective was flawed and short-sighted. It is far more important for the spirits of people to be healed than their bodies. And distracting Jesus from preaching for them to repent and obey God and his righteousness hindered his work for the salvation of their eternal spirits.

Never think you know better than God does about anything. Trust and obey what he commands, regardless of how it seems to you or how unpopular it may be. For in the long run obeying his commands always proves best.

That passage says he was **“no longer able to enter openly into a city, but was outside in desolate places.”** However, a later passage says he entered into villages and cities as well as into fields (see Mark 6:56). We also know that he often went to Jerusalem during the time of their feasts (those commanded by the law of Moses). Moreover, the very next passage says he entered into Capernaum. However, that passage also says **“after some days it was heard that he was in a house.”** That means he came in private not publicly.

Notice how the record says that Jesus was no longer able to enter *openly* into a city. Apparently therefore, whenever he entered the villages and cities it was necessary for him to conceal his presence from the multitudes. Whenever he entered them, he came in private with only his disciples. It was only during his final entrance into Jerusalem that he came in public (see Mark 11).

Jesus' authority to forgive sins

- **And having again entered into Capernaum, after some days it was heard that he was in a house. And straightaway many were gathered together, so as to accommodate no more, not even near the door. And he spoke the word to them. And they come bringing to him a paralyzed man, being taken by four men. And not being able to come near to him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was. And when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralyzed man lay.**
- **And having seen their faith, Jesus says to the paralyzed man, Child, thy sins are forgiven thee. But some of the scholars were sitting there, and deliberating in their hearts, Why does this man speak blasphemies this way. Who can forgive sins but one, God?**
- **And straightaway Jesus, having perceived in his spirit that they so deliberated within themselves, said to them, Why do ye deliberate these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralyzed man, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (he says to the paralyzed man), I say to thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go to thy house.**
- **And straightaway he arose, and having taken up the bed, he went forth before them all, so as for all to be amazed, and to glorify God, saying, We never saw it like this (Mark 2:1-12).**

Jesus always praised the efforts of industrious men who strive for righteous things. And the extra effort made by the friends of that paralyzed man is a good example.

Jesus gave many signs and wonders to prove that God was with him. And healing that paralyzed man was one of them. For only God has the power to do such things. Unlike popular mythology, the devil has no power to heal miraculously the way Jesus did, nor does anyone else.

It was the power of God that enable Jesus to heal, as he himself said to his apostles: **“Do thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). Jesus always gave the Father credit for what he could do. Therefore, we certainly should always give the Father credit for the good that we can do.

The scholars and Pharisees were so blinded in their hearts, that they never appreciated anything Jesus did. But the common people did. And the multitudes marveled and glorified God for giving such authority to men. Jesus used that authority, not to gain earthly power or to make himself rich, but to help the sick and afflicted, and to glorify the Father.

Regarding Jesus' authority to forgive sins, Jesus proved he had that authority by his power to heal the paralyzed man. For he said his power to heal the man was **“that ye may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”** Anybody can say, “Thy

sins have been forgiven thee.” But only Jesus had the power to tell the man to arise and walk, and it would happen. Later Jesus gave that power to his apostles and some others among his followers before the New Testament was written.

Notice the compassion Jesus had for the paralyzed man. Jesus healed both the body of the man and his spirit. He told him to cheer up, because his sins had been forgiven him. That suggests the man’s paralysis was a result of sins he had committed. Many of our afflictions are caused by our personal sins. However, many of them are caused by the sins of others. The example of Job proves that suffering is not always caused by our own sins.

Eating with tax collectors and sinners

- **And he went forth again by the sea, and all the multitude resorted to him, and he taught them. And as he passed by he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And he says to him, Follow thou me. And having risen, he followed him. And it came to pass, while he was dining in his house, that many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many, and they followed him.**
- **And the scholars of the Pharisees, when they saw him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to his disciples, Why is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?**
- **And when Jesus heard it he says to them, Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those faring badly. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners for repentance (Mark 2:13-17).**

Levi was also called Matthew. And although he was a hated tax collector he was later chosen to become one of Jesus’ apostles. People have never enjoyed having to pay taxes. However, those tax collectors were especially resented by the Jews because they were serving the Roman occupation of their country. Hence, those tax collectors were considered contemptible men in the eyes of the people, and they ranked them with sinners. They were ranked with sinners because the people considered those taxes illegitimately imposed by a foreign power.

Although Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners, he did not fraternize with them. He accepted their invitations so that he would have an opportunity to convert them. He was primarily a physician of the spirit who came to save lives not destroy them. Healing their bodies was to provide evidence in support of his main goal.

After explaining to the Pharisees why he ate and drank with the tax collectors and sinners, Jesus rebuked those Pharisees for being ignorant of the passage about God preferring mercy to rituals like animal sacrifices. As Jehovah said through the Old Testament prophet Hosea, **“O Ephraim, what shall I do to thee? O Judah, what shall I do to thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewed them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth. And thy judgments are as the light that goes forth.**

“For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant. There they have dealt treacherously against me” (Hosea 6:4-7).

When Jesus commanded repentance, it was for those who needed it. All men need repentance to some degree, but the righteous need no persuasion. They want to repent when they find themselves guilty, just as the apostle Paul did when he learned that he had been persecuting Christ. Sinners need to be called to repentance. They need to be motivated to repent.

When to fast

- **And John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees were fasting. And they come and say to him, Why do John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees fast, but the disciples with you do not fast?**
- **And Jesus said to them, The sons of the wedding hall cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those day.**
- **And no man sews a new patch of cloth on an old garment, otherwise the patch of it pulls away, the new from the old, and a tear becomes worse. And no man puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine bursts the wineskins, and the wine is spilled, and the wineskins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins (Mark 2:18-22).**

Jesus was always completely rational in his teaching, and the above description is one example. It is inappropriate to fast during times of celebration. And it is foolish not to match things together properly. Remember the saying about how one rotten apple can spoil a whole barrel of them. Another example of doing things inappropriately would be to keep adding fresh milk to a container with some residue of old milk. The old milk will eventually sour and spoil all of it including the fresh milk. Living wisely means living rationally. And having faith in God and Christ is the most rational thing we can do. Having no faith in God, or having blind faith is for fools.

Things allowed on the sabbath

- **And it came to pass, that he was passing through the grain fields on the sabbath day, and his disciples began to make a path while plucking the ears. And the Pharisees said to him, Look, why are they doing what is not permitted on the sabbath day?**
- **And he said to them, Did ye never read what David did when he had need, and was hungry, he and those with him? How he entered into the house of God under Abiathar the high priest, and ate the loaves of the presentation,**

which is not permitted to eat except for the priests; and he also gave to those who were with him? (Mark 2:23-26).

Plucking the ears of grain in a grain field was permitted by the law of Moses. For the law says, **“When thou come into thy neighbor’s vineyard, then thou may eat thy fill of grapes at thine own pleasure, but thou shall not put any in thy vessel. When thou come into thy neighbor’s standing grain, then thou may pluck the ears with thy hand, but thou shall not move a sickle to thy neighbor’s standing grain”** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25).

That law was an example of how Jehovah wanted his people to be a brotherhood, generous and sharing with each other. However, there were few handouts; the recipients were to work for most of what they were given, as other laws show (see for example Leviticus 19:9-10).

Regarding the sabbath, the weekly sabbath day of rest was unique to the Israelites. And the rest of the world has discovered what a wonderful blessing it is. There seems to be a natural need for every man to rest at least one day a week. Christians are not bound by the sabbath law, because we are under the law of liberty. Therefore, we can adjust our times of rest to fit circumstances. Nevertheless, it is still wise to try to have such a time of rest whenever possible, although not necessarily on a specific day of the week as the law of Moses required.

By the time of Jesus the Jews had added many more restrictions to what they were allowed to do on the sabbath day than Moses ever gave. For example, they created what was called a sabbath day’s journey, which defined specifically how far they could travel on that day.

The Jews had completely perverted the original purpose of the sabbath. God gave the sabbath to bless the people not to add more burdens to them. That is why Jesus said in the next passage, **“The sabbath came into being for sake of man, and not man for sake of the sabbath”** (Mark 2:27).

The Pharisees were especially blinded by a legalistic interpretation of the righteousness of God. However, Jesus exposed the contradiction that such a mentality creates. The Pharisees were so blindly legalistic that there were times when they would rather have the sick and afflicted continue suffering rather than violate their narrow interpretation of the law. Yet they were wretched sinners, being, as Jesus said, **“inside full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness”** (Matthew 23:27).

Here is the law about the loaves of the presentation (also called showbread): **“And thou shall take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes of it. Two tenth parts of an ephah shall be in one cake. And thou shall set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before Jehovah. And thou shall put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire to Jehovah.**

“Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually. It is on the behalf of the sons of Israel, an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons. And they shall eat it in a holy place, for it is most holy to him of the offerings of Jehovah made by fire by a perpetual statute” (Leviticus 24:5-9).

David and those with him ate the loaves of the presentation (which were for the priests) at one time when he was fleeing king Saul who wanted to kill him.

Here is what the record says about it: **“Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling, and said to him, Why are thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has commanded me a business, and has said to me, Let no man know anything of the business about which I send thee, and what I have commanded thee, and I have assigned the young men to such and such a place.**

“Now therefore what is under thy hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread. If only the young men have kept themselves from women.

“And David answered the priest, and said to him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days. When I came out the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was but a common journey. How much more then today shall their vessels be holy?

“So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there but the showbread that was taken from before Jehovah to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away” (First Samuel 21:1-6).

Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech. Abiathar was apparently serving the office of high priest at that time, but Ahimelech is the priest who met David. David was not forthright with Ahimelech the priest because he no doubt did not want Ahimelech to be accused of aiding him while he was fleeing king Saul.

However, Saul was such a wicked man that he later killed Ahimelech and all the priests there (85 of them) even though Ahimelech knew nothing about Saul’s (false) accusations against David.

God never criticized David for not being forthright with Ahimelech or for taking the loaves of the presentation, which were for the priests only. Indeed, Jesus gave that story as an example of how God does not want us to blindly apply his laws in a rigid legalistic way.

The purpose of the sabbath

- **And he said to them, The sabbath came into being for sake of man, and not man for sake of the sabbath. So then the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).**

Those Jews had taken the blessing of that weekly day of rest, and had so added to the restrictions of what could be done, that the day became more a burden than a blessing. They completely missed the purpose of it. And even now the Jews have so added to their laws that it has become an impossible burden for them, because none of them succeed in obeying them all, which makes them all guilty.

Moses himself will condemn them, because he commanded against such additions. For he said to those ancient Israelites, **“Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).**

And it is just as big a mistake for men who believe in Christ to add to his commandments, as it is to take away from them. And many who claim to believe in him have been guilty of both kinds of deviations: obeying too many or too few commandments. They stray one way or the other from the straight path of obedience. Beware of such deviations. Keep yourself fully informed of the knowledge contained in the Bible, and you will not stray, if your heart is right.

Healing on the sabbath

- **And he entered again into the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him whether he would heal him on the sabbath day, so that they might accuse him. And he says to the man who had a withered hand, Stand up in the midst.**
- **And he says to them, Is it permitted to do good on the sabbath day or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent. And having looked around on them with anger, being grieved at the callousness of their heart, he says to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as the other (Mark 3:1-5).**

That is another example of their blind legalistic interpretation of the commands of God. They thought it was illegal to heal on the sabbath day. Therefore, they watched Jesus to see if he would heal, and that would give them something to accuse him. However, Jesus asked them what was allowed on the sabbath day: doing good or doing harm, saving life or killing?

But those hypocrites would not even answer him. They knew if they did he would prove them wrong, because he had always proven them wrong. Nevertheless, they never gave up their rigid legalism regardless of how effectively Jesus reasoned with them. Whenever he defeated them, they would just leave enraged and plot how to destroy him.

Notice how they aroused Jesus' emotions; he was angry and grieved. He was angry because they refused to reason with him, and he was grieved at the callousness of their hearts. Nevertheless, Jesus never lost control of his emotions. Nor did he allow the opposition to prevent him from doing good. He healed the man even though they would accuse him, but not to his face. They would not accuse him to his face because they knew he would embarrass them by proving they were wrong.

The Pharisees sought to destroy him

- **And the Pharisees having gone out, they straightaway were making a plot with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him (Mark 3:6).**

The Pharisees claimed to be the most righteous of the Jews. Yet they were in league with the wicked Herodians. It is a sign of spiritual degeneracy when the leaders of the people cooperate with the most wicked men and seek their help. And the Herodians were indeed wicked men. For both of the kings who were named Herod that are mentioned in the Bible were very wicked and ruthless men.

Unlike the common people, who rejoiced when Jesus performed such miracles of healing, those Pharisees only wanted to destroy him. They wanted to destroy him because he exposed their and condemned their evil behavior. He also embarrassed them in public when he defeated their accusations against him. And that also made them hate him. Jesus always spoke the truth, but they were not interested in truth. Their greatest desire in public was to make a good impression to the people.

Healing many who came from near and far

- **And Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him. And from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, having heard how many things he did, came to him.**
- **And he spoke to his disciples that a small boat would stay by him because of the crowd, lest they should throng him. For he healed many, so as to press upon him, so that as many as had afflictions might touch him** (Mark 3:7-10).

So many people had spread the word that Jesus could heal them that multitudes came even from afar. The small boat he wanted to be near him was because the crowds tended to throng and press upon him. And if that happened there he could get into the small boat near the shore and teach from it. They wanted to touch him because healing power came forth from him (see Luke 6:19).

Idumaea was another name for Edom, the country founded by Esau the brother of Jacob (Israel). It was located southeast of Israel. Tyre and Sidon were seaport cities of the Gentiles, and were located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea northwest of Jerusalem. Jordan refers to the river east of Jerusalem and running north to south ending at the Dead Sea.

Commanding unclean spirits to be silent

- **And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him, and cried out, saying, Thou are the Son of God. And he chided them much that they should not make him known** (Mark 3:11-12).

Jesus never allowed evil spirits to be witnesses for him. God wants righteous souls to be witnesses for him not evil ones. Indeed, God wants no help for holy things from anything that is evil. Consider this example from the law of Moses: **“Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of Jehovah thy God for any vow, for even both these are an abomination to Jehovah thy God”** (Deuteronomy 23:18). Male prostitutes were called dogs. God would not allow earnings from people doing unholy things to be contributed to his holy work. And Jesus would not allow evil spirits to testify for him.

Appointing his apostles

- **And he goes up onto the mountain, and calls in those whom he himself wanted, and they went to him. And he appointed twelve men, so that they**

might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to heal diseases and to cast out demons.

- **And he added to Simon the name Peter; and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, and he added to them the name Boanerges, which is, Sons of thunder; and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. And they come to a house (Mark 3:13-19).**

Here is the list of names of the twelve men Jesus selected to be his apostles:

Simon Peter
 James the brother of John
 John
 Andrew the brother of Peter
 Philip
 Bartholomew
 Matthew
 Thomas
 James the son of Alphaeus
 Thaddaeus. Matthew says Lebbaeus was surnamed Thaddaeus. Luke says he was
 Judas the son of James.
 Simon the Canaanite
 Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of God, which he used to open its doors (figuratively) when he offered the Jews to become disciples of Christ after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2). James and John were brothers, and together with Peter were considered “pillars” of the church (see Galatians 2:9). Those three were the men Jesus selected to go with him on special occasions.

Thomas is best known for being a skeptic, because of which people now refer to him as doubting Thomas. Matthew wrote a biography of Jesus. He is also called Levi (see Luke 5:27). Andrew and Philip are occasionally mentioned in the new testament. Several men in the new testament are named James. James the son of Alphaeus is probably the James that is mentioned several times in the book of Acts as serving in a special way. Bartholomew, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite are only mentioned when the apostles are listed. Judas Iscariot is the man who betrayed him.

Jesus appointed those twelve men to be his apostles (the word apostle means sent on a mission). The number twelve is another number in the Bible that symbolizes completeness or sufficiency. Hence, Jesus chose a sufficient number of men to send out as his representatives, or as Paul called them, his ambassadors: **“And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore, ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were call-**

ing through us. We plead on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God” (Second Corinthians 5:18-20).

Jesus sent them forth to preach repentance and the kingdom of God. Notice how Jesus also gave those men authority to heal diseases and to cast out demons. God had given his Son Jesus Christ that authority and power, and Jesus gave it to his apostles. Of course the authority and power that God gave Jesus was without measure. For when John the immerser was testifying about Jesus, he said: **“For he whom God sent speaks the sayings of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand”** (John 3:34-35).

Other men who preached the kingdom of God were always given a limited amount of that power (only the apostles could preach with authority), and even then it was given only when the church was beginning. For no man has any of that special authority and power now. Let no man deceive you.

Jesus labors to heal the sick

- **And the multitude comes together again, so as for them, no, not even to be able to eat bread. And when those with him heard it, they went out to grasp him, for they said, He is beside himself** (Mark 3:20-21).

That is one example of why Jesus chided many of the people whom he healed not to make him known, lest he be overburdened with multitudes of people to heal. That passage shows how much effort was required for him to continually heal. It was God’s power that enabled him to heal (see Luke 8:46), but it was labor for him to apply that power, just as we expend energy (power) when we labor.

Jesus the Son of God was in a body of flesh. And he could not possibly heal all of the afflicted of the world. If God wanted all the sick of the world to be healed he could easily do it from his throne in heaven. Read my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity* for explanations why he does not.

That passage clearly shows the zeal and compassion Jesus had to heal the people. However, being too burdened that way would have kept him from his most important mission. Which was to proclaim repentance and his good news of the kingdom of God to the lost sheep of Israel (see Matthew 15:24). Therefore, he had no choice but to try to limit their numbers.

Accused of being having Beelzebub

- **And the scholars who came down from Jerusalem said, He has Beelzebub, and, By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons. And having summoned them, he said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has rise up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end** (Mark 3:22-26).

Because the scholars hated Jesus they could not give him credit for doing anything good. They hated him because he exposed their hypocrisy and their evils. Even doing such a good and compassionate deed as casting out demons was condemned by them as being from the devil. For Beelzebub is another name for Satan, the ruler of the demons. And the devil, being the chief accuser against the righteous, those disciples of the devil falsely accused Jesus that way. It was a cruel accusation, because it also condemned the afflicted as being cured by the power of the devil.

Nevertheless, as Jesus always did, he exposed the absurdity of their charge. He reminded them how organizations cannot stand when they are divided against themselves. Their charge against Jesus was like accusing the police of being crime bosses because they were able to stop criminals.

I say more about Satan's kingdom in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Plundering goods of a strong man

- **But no man, having entered into the house of the strong man, can plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man, and then he may plunder his house** (Mark 3:27).

When Jesus gave the example of plundering the goods of a man's house, he was certainly not justifying indiscriminate plunder. When a wicked man wants to plunder an innocent man's house, he must first disarm that man. When righteous men want to plunder a wicked man's house, they must first bind or imprison the wicked man. Plundering a wicked man's house is (1) an act of recovering what he obtained unjustly, or (2) a form of punishment. Law enforcement officials commonly do it.

Blasphemy against the Spirit

- **Truly I say to you, that all the sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and the blasphemies, as many as they may blaspheme. But whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness, into the age, but is deserving of eternal damnation, because they said, He has an unclean spirit** (Mark 3:28-30).

In order to understand what Jesus meant by blasphemy of the Spirit, you need to know that the Holy Spirit of God personifies all that is righteous. For Paul said, **"Therefore I make known to you, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed, and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit"** (First Corinthians 12:3). According to what Paul said, God's Holy Spirit is the ultimate force underlying every act of righteousness, whatever it may be. (I explain that much more in my comments about that passage in First Corinthians.)

Hence, I believe blasphemy of the Spirit is not a single sin but an enduring attitude of the heart. I believe it refers to an attitude of contempt toward the works of righteousness, which some men clearly have. What prompted Jesus to say those words about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was the contempt the Pharisees had toward his good work of casting out demons. And any man who lives and dies with that attitude of heart will never be forgiven.

I speak in much more detail about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. In the appendix to that book I also explain how every man not guilty of blasphemy against the Spirit may have the opportunity to work his way out of hell by paying every debt he owes against God. Jesus implied that when he spoke of having to pay “the last quadrans” if you are not reconciled with your creditor (see Matthew 5:26). And since we are all indebted to God, then every man not redeemed by his Son Jesus Christ will be required to pay his every debt.

Nevertheless, even though I believe some souls can be finally released from hell that way, they will never become sons of God to live with him and with Christ in the New Jerusalem of heaven. Moreover, every soul with that contemptuous attitude in his heart about righteousness (blasphemy of the Spirit) will never get out, because that sin will never be forgiven.

Being his mother, brother, and sister

- **Then his brothers and mother come, and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him. And a multitude was sitting around him, and they said to him, Behold, thy mother, and thy brothers, and thy sisters, outside seek for thee.**
- **And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother and my brothers? And having looked around at those who sat about him, he says, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever may do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:31-35).**

What righteous soul would not be greatly honored to be a close kin to Jesus? Yet he said that those who do the will of God are his true kin. Actually, we who are faithfully obedient to God are considered his brothers. Therefore, think not that Jesus’ mother and his earthly brothers and sisters had any advantage over anyone who obeys God.

The parable of the soil

- **And again he began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to him, so as for him, after entering into the boat, to sit on the sea, and all the multitude was by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things in parables, and said to them in his teaching, Listen.**
- **Behold, the man who sows went forth to sow. And it came to pass during the sowing, some fell by the path, and the birds came and devoured it.**
- **And others fell on the rocky ground where it had not much soil. And straightaway it sprang up, because it had no depth of soil. And when the sun was risen it was scorched, and because it had no root it dried out.**
- **And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it gave no fruit.**

- **And others fell into the good ground and gave fruit, coming up and increasing, and brought forth, one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred. And he said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Mark 4:1-9).**

Jesus spoke many parables to the multitudes, and such stories have two meanings: a physical one and a spiritual one. Parables also have several other values. One value of parables is that they tell lessons of spiritual value in the context of things the people are familiar with. Another value is that parables are easier to remember than lessons expressed in more intellectual language. A third value is that the spiritual meaning is usually concealed to those who are unworthy of it.

Jesus next explains why he wanted his teachings concealed to some, followed by an explanation of the parable to his disciples. Many times Jesus said, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”** In other words, if you have the ability to understand, then use that ability. For you will be judged for it.

Knowing the mysteries of the kingdom

- **And when he became alone, those around him, with the twelve, asked him the parable. And he said to them, To you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those outside, all things occur in parables. So that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand, lest they should turn, and the sins would be forgiven them (Mark 4:10-12).**

What Jesus said in the above passage is very difficult for most people to accept. Jesus did not want the multitude to turn and be forgiven, because they were unworthy. God has made the world so that only worthy souls will come to him for salvation. He wants the unworthy to be condemned. They are his enemies and the source of all evil. Why should they escape punishment? If a foreign army were attacking your country, would you want them warned about attacks against that enemy army? Only blind fools or traitors would even consider such a thing.

Teaching wicked men how to escape their punishment is something only the disciples of the devil do. God knows whose hearts are worthy of being converted, and they are the ones whose eyes and ears he opens, and whose hearts he softens to understand. Nevertheless remember, only God knows such things. Therefore, we must offer the hope of salvation to whoever will listen to us. And we must pray even for those who persecute us. For they may include men like the righteous man Paul who was a former persecutor.

Disappointed in them

- **And he says to them, Do ye not know this parable? And how will ye understand all the parables? (Mark 4:13).**

Jesus was often disappointed by the slowness of his disciples to understand what he said. Since they did not understand that parable, he wondered how they would understand all the others. It was a mild rebuke to encourage them to try harder and think deeper for

understanding. And that is a goal we should all pursue: deeper and clearer understanding about all that he taught. And the reason I write my books is to help you have a deeper and clearer understanding of all of the word of God.

Interpreting the parable of the soil

- **The man who sows sows the word. And these are those by the path where the word is sown. And whenever they may hear, straightaway Satan comes, and takes away the word that has been sown in their hearts.**
- **And these in like manner are those being sown upon the rocky places, who, whenever they may hear the word, straightaway receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but are temporary. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution develops because of the word, straightaway they are caused to stumble.**
- **And these are those being sown in the thorns, who hear the word, and the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of wealth, and the cravings about other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**
- **And these are those that were sown upon the good ground, who hear the word and receive it, and bear fruit, one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred (Mark 4:14-20).**

The four different kinds of soil in that parable (that by the wayside, the rocky, the thorny, and the good) symbolize four different kinds of spirits of men. The four different spirits are (1) those who allow the evil in their hearts to immediately dismiss the word of the kingdom, (2) those whose hearts are so weak and shallow that they cannot endure the tribulations and persecutions that go with faith in Christ, (3) those who allow their worldly cares and love of money to keep them from being fruitful disciples, and (4) those whose spirits are strong and righteous so that they understand it and become very productive disciples for the cause of Christ.

Notice how men with the good spirits are the minority. It has always been that way in this world, and it always will be. Remember what Jesus said about the ways of life: **“Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Matthew 7:13-14).

Hiding things

- **And he said to them, Does the lamp come so that it might be put under the bushel or under the bed? Is it not so that it might be put on the lampstand? For there is not anything hid, except that it may be revealed, nor become secret, but that it may come to be visible. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear (Mark 4:21-23).**

We who are of the truth and the light want our ways known and our light to shine. As Jesus said, **“For every man who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God”** (John 3:20-21). And everything wrought of God is right and good and just.

Evil men try to conceal their evil deeds. And many succeed—for a time. But whether in this life or in the next one, everything ever done will become visible, including everything done in secret and concealed.

“If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.” Let every man who is able to receive the words of our Lord, let him accept them and live by them.

Having and receiving

- **And he said to them, Watch what ye hear. By what measure ye measure, it will be measured to you, and to those who hear, it will be added to you. For whoever has, to him it will be given. And he who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him** (Mark 4:24-25).

Jesus warned us to watch what we hear. For in one sense our minds are like our stomachs. Just as it is filthy and dangerous to put filthy and toxic substances in our stomachs, so also it is foolish to put filthy and dangerous things into our minds. As I have become older and wiser, I strive more actively to reject and shun things I hear and see that are filthy and dangerous. Indeed, such things now seem like putrid food to my senses; they are nauseating and repulsive. People with filthy minds are attracted to filthy experiences. People with pure and clean minds are repulsed by them, and instead are attracted to pure and clean experiences.

One of the foolish things this generation of Americans has tolerated is the proclamation of filthy words and sights. They now worship our federal Constitution, and use that document to justify allowing those evil things. Yet they have very stringent rules and controls about what kinds of things can be put into our mouths. Consequently, the physical health of our citizens has improved, but their spiritual and mental health has become much worse.

What Jesus meant by measuring refers to sharing and distributing. And he who shares and distributes abundantly will receive abundantly. As Solomon said, **“There is he who scatters, and increases yet more, and there he is who withholds more than is proper, but only to want”** (Proverbs 11:24). And it can also be said that he who spreads evil greatly will receive evil greatly. For Paul said, **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap”** (Galatians 6:7).

The proverb that Jesus spoke about having and receiving expresses a profound truth. It is a general fact that whoever has, more will be given him, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away. There are numerous examples of that truth.

Here are a few: It is common knowledge among money managers that the more money a man has the more he can get, and the less a man has the more quickly it is used up. Every educator knows that it is easy to teach an educated man, but much harder to teach one that

is not educated. An industrious man will become even more industrious, while the indolent man becomes progressively more indolent. The man of faith in God continually has his faith strengthened, while the man without faith loses what he may have had. Remember, however, there are always exceptions to every rule. And a few men can rise above such limitations, for God has given us all the power to change and strive to overcome limitations.

The kingdom of God is like seed

- **And he said, Thus is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and lengthen, he knows not how. For the earth bears fruit spontaneously, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the fruit yields, straightaway he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29).**

In that parable the seed symbolizes the teachings of the good news of Christ. And the ground symbolizes the hearts and minds of those who hear it. Our job is to plant that seed in the minds of people, and then let it grow in their hearts. And if their hearts are good, that seed will change their lives to be fruitful for righteousness. The harvest of the parable may symbolize the end of the world when Jesus will gather his chosen for heaven.

When the apostle Paul spoke about the church, he used the same kind of analogy. He said, **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused growth”** (First Corinthians 3:6). Paul established congregations, Apollos nurtured them with his skillful preaching, and God caused them to increase.

The kingdom is like a mustard seed

- **And he said, To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or by what parable shall we compare it? It is like a grain of the mustard plant, which, when it is sown in the ground, is smaller than all the seeds upon the ground. Yet when it is sown, it goes up and becomes greater than all the plants, and it makes great branches, so that the birds of the sky can lodge under the shade of it (Mark 4:30-32).**

The kingdom of God is like a grain of a mustard plant because the kingdom began very small but has grown great. And the congregations of it have become havens for all who love God and his righteousness.

Why Jesus spoke in parables

- **And with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. And he did not speak to them apart from a parable, but privately he explained all things to his disciples (Mark 4:33-34).**

Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables without explanation because they were not his disciples. As disciples of Christ we are privileged to be given understanding about God and things spiritual that the world does not know. The unrepentant sinners of the world are not given that understanding because they are not worthy of it.

Jesus ends the storm

- **And on that day, having become evening, he says to them, Let us pass through to the other side. And having sent the multitude away, they bring him along as he was in the boat. And other small boats were also with him. And a great storm of wind develops, and the waves were thrown into the boat, so as for it now to be filling. And he himself was in the stern sleeping on the cushion.**
- **And they awake him, and say to him, Teacher, does it not concern thee that we perish? And having awoken, he rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Be quiet! Silence! And the wind ceased, and it became a great calm. And he said to them, Why are ye cowardly this way? How have ye no faith? And they feared a great fear, and said to each other, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea also obey him? (Mark 4:35-41).**

Notice how that passage says there were other small boats with him. We are not told who were in those boats, but it seems probable they were other disciples. For Jesus sent the multitude away when it became evening.

Jesus never did anything only for his own comfort. I suspect one reason he was able to sleep during that terrifying storm was because he was so exhausted from his labors, and another reason is because he trusted God would always protect him. Therefore, he calmed the storm for their sakes not his. However, that does not mean we should have no fear of such things nor struggle to overcome their effects. What his disciples apparently lacked was sufficient faith that, with God's help, they would endure.

I have no doubt those men were strong and courageous, and they must have suffered many storms at sea. However, apparently that storm was so severe they thought there was no hope. And when pushed to that degree even courageous men can become cowardly. For example, it is not uncommon for seasoned soldiers on a battle field to scatter when they think there is no hope. Only the most courageous men continue to struggle when it means certain death. Therefore, be not too harsh in judging those men. Wait to see how you would respond to such a terrifying challenge.

Seeing Jesus calm that powerful storm proved that Jesus was no ordinary man. And only those in the small boats had that experience. We know of it by their testimony. And trusting their testimony should prove to us that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was truly the Son of God, because only God has the power to do such things. There were other such things Jesus did that only his apostles experienced. However, Jesus commissioned them to share their experiences about him and his good news of our salvation. And as a result of their efforts we have the marvelous New Testament record. For we have no evidence that

Jesus ever wrote anything about his ministry. Without the labors of those men, we would know virtually nothing about him.

Unlike the record of that event in the biographies by Matthew and Luke, this passage in Mark indicates that his disciples complained to Jesus about his apparent lack of concern about that dangerous storm. That may have been one reason why he accused them of being cowardly, which was a rebuke for their lack of faith.

This passage in Mark also says that his disciples feared a great fear when he calmed the wind and the sea. It is very natural for people to fear when they see such enormous power exhibited by a man.

A wild demoniac

- **And they came to the other side of the sea into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he came out of the boat, straightaway there met him out of the sepulchers a man with an unclean spirit who had his habitation among the sepulchers.**
- **And no man was able to bind him, not even with chains. Because he was often bound with shackles and chains, and the chains were pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces. And no man had strength to subdue him. And always, night and day, in the mountains and in the sepulchers, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones (Mark 5:1-5).**

The biography of Jesus by Matthew says the place was the country of the Gergesenes. Gadara and the Gergesa must refer to the same area. And that area and the people of it must have been part of the old tribe of Manasseh, half of which was located east of the Sea of Galilee.

Otherwise Jesus would not have gone there. For he told a Canaanite woman who asked him to heal her daughter, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). And he said to his apostles when he sent them out to preach: **“Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6).

The power of that unclean spirit over that man caused him to act like a wild animal. Evil spirits are also called demons, and they are very mysterious creatures. However, we can think of them like germs that invade our bodies and make them ill. If you wonder why evil spirits cause such violence in the men they possess, just consider all the senseless violence and vandalism committed by unruly young men. Evil spirits, whether of men or of demons, get a morbid pleasure out of destructiveness.

When Matthew gives this story he says there were two men who were demon possessed, while both Mark and Luke speak of only one man. Perhaps the reason why only one demoniac is mentioned in Mark and Luke is because he was the man who loved Jesus and served him. (Mark mentions that part of the story a little farther on. Luke also tells it, but Matthew does not mention it at all.)

Hence, the reason Mark and Luke only mention one man is because only one of them was worthy of being healed. Although Jesus healed them both (as reported in Matthew), Mark and Luke chose to only tell the story of the worthy man of the two.

Consider the different worthiness of people who were in the same situation when Jesus spoke about preparing for the end of the world: **“Then two men will be in the field, one is taken, and one is left. Two women grinding at the mill, one is taken, and one is left. Watch therefore, because ye know not at what hour your Lord comes”** (Matthew 24:40-42). Apparently therefore, Mark and Luke did not consider the ungrateful demoniac worth mentioning.

The demon questions Jesus

- **And when he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and worshiped him. And having cried out in a great voice, he said, What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, do not torment me. For he said to him, Come out from the man, thou unclean spirit** (Mark 5:6-8).

That record in Matthew says, **“What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?”** (Matthew 8:29), and in Luke it says, **“What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I beseech thee, do not torment me”** (Luke 8:28).

The slight different in the wording (besides the “me” and “us” reference to the demon, which I explain in the next passage) is because each one gave only part of the demoniac’s words. They were all correct in what they reported. The differences were simply a matter of what each biographer chose to report. It is very common for people to use different words to report the same thing, even when they are reporting about what someone said.

Men are not inanimate devices that only record the sounds of things. When people report conversations, they usually remember what was said in terms of the message given and not the exact words that were uttered. It all depends upon what the reporter considers important. Let not scoffers lead you astray about such things.

Those evil spirits recognized Jesus as the Son of God, but they wanted nothing to do with him. Demons are rebel spirits, and they want to live the unrestricted and wanton life of sin. Therefore, they reject God and his Son Jesus Christ. The world is filled with men with the same kind of spirit as those demons. They love the wanton life of sin, and have no love for God. Try rebuking the sins of any one of them and you will see how much they hate God and his righteousness.

Those evil spirits knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and they were afraid of God. But they had no love for him. They loved living in sin. Therefore, they chose to risk following the devil. We know very little about them.

Those evil spirits may have thought that Jesus was going to deprive them of their freedom to live independently of God. All sinners consider obedience to God to be torment. They consider God’s commands against sin to be a painful burden to them. Consider what the psalmist said about them: **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain**

things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:1-3). Sinners think God’s commands are bonds and cords.

The demon’s name

- **And he demanded him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion, because we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them outside of the territory (Mark 5:6-10).**

Both Mark and Luke mention Jesus asking for the name of the demon. The demon said he was Legion because they were many. That tells why there is a mixing of the singular and the plural in referring to the unclean spirit, because one spoke for them all: **“What is with me and with thee?”** versus **“What is with us and thee?”**

The demons go into the swine

- **Now there was near the mountain a great herd of swine feeding. And all the demons besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, so that we may enter into them. And straightaway, Jesus allowed them. And the unclean spirits having come out, entered into the swine. And the herd stampeded down the slope into the sea. And there were about two thousand, and they were drowned in the sea (Mark 5:11-13).**

In the book of Luke the demons entreated Jesus not to command them to go out into the abyss. The abyss seems to be a kind of temporary prison for guilty spirits, because the Bible says that one day the devil will be cast there for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:1-3). Those demons were even willing to be housed in a herd of swine rather than go out into the abyss.

Nevertheless, even when Jesus allowed them, they were such wild spirits that they immediately drove the swine to self-destruction. It is to the credit of the men that were possessed by them that they did not allow those demons to cause them to destroy themselves. Those men apparently had enough self-control to keep that from happening.

Now it is reasonable to ask why would those demons destroy the swine when they knew it would mean having to go into the abyss? I can only surmise it was because those swine lacked enough power of self-preservation to keep those wild spirits restrained enough to prevent their destruction. Or perhaps the swine became so alarmed by being possessed that they panicked and stampeded wildly, forcing those in front of them into the water while those behind followed blindly. The slope may also have had a sharp drop at the edge, making it more difficult to avoid falling. Whatever was the reason, it is obvious those demons did not want that to happen.

Mark says there were about two thousand of those swine. The fact the people were raising such large herds of swine indicates how far they had gone from the law of Moses. For the law declared swine unclean and forbidden for human consumption. Jesus abolished all those laws, because we are now under the law of liberty to use our wisdom about foods.

The people from the city ask Jesus to leave

- **And those who fed the swine fled, and reported in the city and in the fields. And they came to see what it was that happened. And they come to Jesus, and see the man who was demon-possessed, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind (the man who had the legion), and they were afraid. And those who saw it related to them how it happened to the man who was demon-possessed, and about the swine. And they began to beg him to depart from their borders (Mark 5:14-17).**

Mark says the people were afraid when they saw that the former demoniac was now a healthy man. Remember how the disciples of Jesus feared a great fear when they saw how he calmed the storm that had threatened their lives. It is natural for people to fear when they see such power in the hands of a man.

Nevertheless, it is amazing to me that those people besought Jesus to depart from their regions. Of course, they were filled with fear when they learned he had such power. They were probably also troubled at the death of all those swine, which represented a large financial loss to them. Jesus allowed that loss because those swine were unclean beasts that were dangerous to eat. He knew it, but they did not.

Mankind now knows how dangerous it is to eat such pork unless it is carefully cooked, because when they live in the countryside those animals are full of parasites. And those swine would probably have caused much disease and death from the infection of those who ate them. Jesus actually blessed those people by allowing those swine to be destroyed. There are even now many people in places like Africa who suffer many diseases because of things like unclean water, which they continually drink. They drink it from ignorance and unbelief, not believing it will harm them without disinfecting it.

The healed man obeys Jesus

- **And as he entered into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed besought him that he might be with him. But Jesus did not allow him, but says to him, Go to thy house to thy men, and report to them how much the Lord has done for thee, and was merciful to thee. And he departed, and began to proclaim in Decapolis how much Jesus did for him. And all men marveled (Mark 5:18-20).**

Like some others who had been healed by Jesus, the former demoniac wanted to be with him. But Jesus commanded him to stay and witness to his people what the Lord had done for him. Remember, Jesus often commanded those he had healed to keep silent about it and not inform others, but those times were when the healing was less public.

The healed man was very faithful in his obedience. And as a result all the men in that region marveled. They needed to marvel about Jesus, and be more receptive to his good news of salvation. Remember, they pleaded with Jesus to depart from their borders without even wanting to hear what he was teaching.

Jesus is asked to heal a ruler's daughter

- **And when Jesus crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to him, and he was near the sea. And behold, one of the synagogue rulers comes, Jairus by name. And having seen him, he falls at his feet, and besought him much, saying, My little daughter has a terminal condition, so that having come, thou may lay thy hands on her, that she may be saved and will live (Mark 5:21-23).**

Matthew simply says the man was a ruler, while Mark was more specific, saying he was a synagogue ruler. Mark also tells how the man fell at the feet of Jesus to plead with him for his daughter. According to Matthew the man said his daughter had just perished (see Matthew 9:18). While here in Mark he said she had a terminal condition, and in Luke he said she was dying (see Luke 8:42).

Remember, the New Testament was written in Greek. And the Greek word for perished may also include the idea of imminent and certain death, especially if the person was comatose. In other words, for all practical purposes the person is dead. Actually, death is rarely instantaneous. That is why physicians can sometimes revive persons who are said to have died. True death can never be revived without a miracle. Nevertheless, those differences are just another trivial puzzle that is insignificant to the value of the story.

Healing a woman with an issue of blood

- **And he went with him, and a great multitude followed him, and they thronged him. And a certain woman, being with an issue of blood twelve years, and having suffered many things by many physicians, and having spent all of her things, and was helped nothing, but who became worse instead, when she heard about Jesus, having come in the crowd from behind, she touched his garment. For she said, If I but touch his garments, I will be healed. And straightaway the flow of her blood was dried up, and she knew in the body that she was healed of her scourge.**
- **And straightaway, Jesus, when he recognized in himself that power went forth from him, having turned around in the crowd, he said, Who touched my garments? And his disciples said to him, Thou see the multitude crowding thee, and thou say, Who touched me? And he looked around to see the woman who did this thing.**
- **But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what has happened to her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said to her, Daughter, thy faith has healed thee. Go in peace, and be healthy from thy scourge (Mark 5:24-34).**

Mark says more about that story than Matthew and Luke. Mark tells how she suffered from her affliction. The woman was so desperate for a cure that she spent all of her things

on physicians. Yet she only suffered more and became worse. That kind of infirmity no doubt greatly restricted her life, and prevented her from doing many things.

The law of Moses said that women with a flow of blood were unclean for seven days after the flow (see Leviticus 15:19). And whoever touched her also became unclean for the remainder of the day. However, being unclean that way simply restricted them from interacting with anything holy, such as at the tabernacle, and later at the temple.

Mark also tells how she was healed from the power that went forth from Jesus. And Jesus sensed that flow of power. Many teachers claim Jesus always knew everything, but that is one example disproving their claim. For Jesus asked who touched him. Jesus had many limitations in his body of flesh. Regarding that power, Jesus told his apostles, **“The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). And those works of the Father included performing the miracles.

It is amusing that his disciples thought it strange that Jesus would ask who touched him. For they knew that the multitude was crowding him, and no doubt some had inadvertently touched his body. When Jesus asked who touched him, it was because he felt power come forth from him at that touch. And that power from the Father came forth from him because of the faith that afflicted woman had in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus blessed the woman for her faith in him.

Restoring the life of a little girl

- **While he still spoke, they come from the synagogue ruler saying, Thy daughter died, why still trouble the teacher? But straightaway, Jesus, having heard the word spoken, says to the ruler of the synagogue, Fear not, only believe. And he allowed no man to accompany him except Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.**
- **And he comes to the house of the synagogue ruler, and sees a commotion, much weeping and wailing. And when he entered in, he says to them, Why do ye make a commotion, and weep? The child did not die, but sleeps. And they ridiculed him.**
- **But he, having put them all out, takes the father of the child and the mother and those with him, and enters in where the child was lying. And having taken the child's hand, he says to her, Talitha cumi. Which is, being interpreted, Little girl, I say to thee, awake. And straightaway the little girl rose up and walked, for she was twelve years old. And they were amazed with a great amazement. And he commanded them much that no man should know this. And he said to give her to eat (Mark 5:35-43).**

Matthew only gives a brief account of that part of the story. Mark tells how the synagogue ruler was told his daughter had died. And the messenger gave him no hope she could be saved. Indeed, he even discouraged any more efforts by asking him why trouble the teacher any longer. That makes me wonder if that messenger and those sent by him had

any faith in Jesus to begin with. Nevertheless, the ruler did believe Jesus could save her. And Jesus strengthened that faith by telling him not to fear, but only believe.

Notice again how Jesus only selected Peter, John, and James to accompany him with the girl's father and mother. Remember, there were several occasions mentioned in the New Testament record of those apostles being selected to go with him somewhere.

Mark tells what Jesus said to the little girl, and he also reports how old she was. Mark also reports how Jesus **"commanded them much that no man should know this."** He also told how Jesus told them to give her to eat. Perhaps the little girl had been seriously ill for a long time, and had lost much weight from not eating. Jesus had healed her of her illness completely, but no doubt he had not restored the body weight she had lost. Therefore, Jesus wanted her to have the nourishment she needed for her body. Matthew says nothing about any of those things.

Notice how the passage says **"they come from the synagogue ruler,"** but the synagogue ruler was already there. That is just another example of how you must accept how the Greek language was used, and not let scoffers use such things to deride the Bible record. Obviously when it says **"they come from the synagogue ruler,"** it means they came from the place of the synagogue ruler.

Also the Greek language often uses the present tense when referring to past events. Linguists call that the historical present. It is just another convention used in the Greek language that we do not use in English, except in writings of fiction. Most translators do not reveal such things from the Greek, but I chose to be as literal as I could, unless it would have been to confusing.

Where prophets are honored

- **And he went out from there, and came into his fatherland, and his disciples follow him. And having become sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. And many who heard him were astonished, saying, How are these things in this man? and, What is the wisdom that was given to him, and such mighty works happen by his hands? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judah and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended by him.**
- **But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor, except in his fatherland, and among his kin, and in his house. And he could do no mighty work there, none, except having laid his hands upon a few feeble men he healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went around the villages teaching (Mark 6:1-6).**

Jesus had returned to where he was raised as a child. And they would not accept him as a prophet because they knew him before his ministry. They knew him both when he was a child and when he was a humble carpenter as a man. They could not understand how he could now be a prophet with words of wisdom and salvation. Most of the men God chose to be his prophets were humble and common men. The only scholar among Jesus' apostles was Paul, and he was not chosen until after Jesus left the earth.

Remember what Jesus said about the humble and lowly: **“I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight”** (Matthew 11:25-26).

Not only would they not accept him as a prophet, but they were even offended by him. They were offended by what he claimed to be, which they could not accept. And their unbelief kept them from being blessed by his mighty works. And so it is with every unbeliever; they miss out on the great blessings of faith in him.

Being impressed with a man’s greatness is much more difficult for those who know him best. For even the greatest of men (except for the Son of God) are still humans with all the frailties and imperfections of men. Consider these words of wisdom from the Psalms: **“Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie”** (Psalm 62:9).

Considering life in this world only (with no hope afterward), men of low degree live meaningless lives full of struggles and deprivations. They are like the man in the song who said he was “tired of livin but scared of dyin.” And men of high degree do not deserve being exalted high. Their lofty status is deceitful. For no man deserves being elevated to high degree. That is one reason why Jesus forbid any of us from lording over each other.

Remember his words: **“Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman”** (Matthew 20:25-27).

It is much easier for a man to be honored and idolized if his frailties and imperfections are not known. That is one reason why a prophet is not honored in his fatherland and in his house. Although Jesus had no imperfections, they did know him as a child, with all the frailness and weaknesses of a normal child. They also knew him as a humble carpenter. Consequently, the people who knew Jesus then could not reconcile him being a prophet while they remembered him that way.

Mark adds here how Jesus could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief. It was always the power of God that enabled Jesus to do his mighty works. For remember, Jesus himself said, **“... the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). And apparently because the people of Jesus’ fatherland had so little faith in him, that God decided they were unworthy to receive the benefits of his mighty works.

Notice how Jesus marveled because of their unbelief. It is always astonishing to see how hardened and blinded the hearts of some men can become, even in the face of powerful evidence. That reminds me of the Jews during the time of Jeremiah. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and their country they still refused to believe it was because of their rejection of Jehovah. Warnings from God’s prophets had been given to them many times, even from the time of Moses.

Here is what the record says about their stubborn refusal to believe: **“Then all the men who knew that their wives burned incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, even all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou have spoken to us in the name of Jehovah, we will not hearken to thee.**

“But we will certainly perform every word that has gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our rulers, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.

“Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men, and to the women, even to all the people who had given him that answer, saying, The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye and your fathers, your kings and your rulers, and the people of the land, did Jehovah not remember them, and did it not come into his mind? So that Jehovah could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed.

“Therefore your land has become a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against Jehovah, and have not obeyed the voice of Jehovah, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies, therefore this evil has happened to you, as it is this day” (Jeremiah 44:15-23).

The Jews steadfastly refused to believe Jeremiah, even though he had prophesied warnings about that destruction for many years before it happened. Their hearts were so hardened that they were too blind to see the truth. And they continued to suffer enormously because of it. And my heart weeps when I see such things beginning to happen in my own country, where there had been such great faith in Christ and God’s holy word.

Sending his apostles forth

- **And he summons the twelve, and began to send them forth in pairs. And he gave them authority over the unclean spirits. And he commanded them that they should take up nothing for the way, except only a staff—no scrip, no bread, no copper in the belt—but shod with sandals, and, Do not wear two coats. And he said to them, Wherever ye enter into a house, lodge there until ye depart from there (Mark 6:7-10).**

Jesus had all authority from God the Father, and he gave his apostles authority over the unclean spirits. Matthew tells how he also gave them authority to heal.

Notice how he sent them forth in pairs. There are many reasons why it is always best to evangelize in pairs. It gives better protection; it gives greater credibility; it allows mutual encouragement.

Notice also how Jesus told them to take no extra provisions. However, here is what he said to them later, just before his trial and crucifixion: **“When I sent you without bag and pouch and shoes, did ye lack anything? And they said, Nothing. Then he said to them, But now, he who has a bag, let him take it, and likewise a pouch. And he who has no sword, let him sell his cloak and buy” (Luke 22:35-36).**

I once heard of some missionaries who boasted of taking no extra provisions with them, as the apostles had first done. They must not have noticed those last instructions Jesus gave. It is now foolish to make no preparations for such work. In fact it is a sin by challenging God when appropriate provisions are not taken.

Also in whatever city or village they entered, his apostles were to ask who in it was worthy, meaning the house of a righteous soul. And they were to remain until they departed that city or village. And that is good advice for all evangelists.

Those not receiving them

- **And as many as might not receive you nor hear you, as ye depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony to them. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom or Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city** (Mark 6:11).

They were not to plead or persevere in places that rejected them, but were simply to shake off the dust from their feet as a sign to them they were rejected by God. And that should be our response to those who will not listen when we bring the good news of Christ to them. Jesus only persisted in reasoning with those who would listen to him, and he continued trying to persuade them. It is when they refuse us altogether that we are to shake off the dust of our feet, although not necessarily literally.

Jesus then told his disciples how those who reject them would be judged more severely at the end of the world. Hence, what he said is further evidence of degrees of punishment in the afterlife.

Regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, Jehovah had visited with Abraham, and as he was departing, he said to him, **“Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which comes to me. And if not, I will know”** (Genesis 18:20-21).

Jehovah sent two of his heavenly agents to investigate those places. Not long after their arrival the men of Sodom tried to rape them homosexually. Those agents used their supernatural powers to escape, and then brought Abraham’s righteous nephew Lot out of the city with them. After that the record says, **“Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground”** (Genesis 19:24-25).

They went preaching and healing

- **And having departed, they preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed many feeble men with olive oil, and healed them** (Mark 6:12-13).

When John the immerser began his ministry he called upon men to repent. When Jesus began his ministry he called upon men to repent. And now his apostles were going out

calling upon men to repent. For salvation the first thing men must do after they believe is to repent of their sins, because no man who continues to sin can be acceptable to God.

The works of casting out demons and healing people were primarily to prove that God was with them. Therefore, whoever heard them would have no excuse if they did not repent. We no longer need to perform miracles to prove that God is with us. For the testimony of the Bible is proof enough that it is the word of God. Therefore, all we need to do is proclaim the truth of God that is contained in the Bible, and live according to it. That is all the proof we need to persuade (those whose hearts are worthy) that God is with us.

Herod conjectures about Jesus

- **And king Herod heard, for his name had become well known. And he said, John, the man who immerses, was raised from the dead, and because of this the powers work in him. Others said, He is Elijah, and others said, He is a prophet, like one of the prophets. But Herod, when he heard, said, This is John whom I beheaded. He was raised from the dead (Mark 6:14-16).**

Herod could not help hearing about Jesus because of all the mighty works of healing that he was doing. Therefore, he wondered about him. How Herod got that superstitious belief about dead men rising with supernatural powers is not known. For the Bible contains no record of any such thing ever happening. It must be remembered that people create many superstitions about many things, some of which are very strange. And the Jews are no different. You can read about such things in other books about the Jews, including many written by their own people.

Those who thought John was Elijah were probably thinking of this prophecy: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6).

Others thought he was a prophet just like any of the other prophets. None of them thought he was the Christ, the Messiah. They all believed the Messiah would be a great warrior-king, nothing like what Jesus was.

Herod arrested and bound John

- **For Herod himself having sent forth, he arrested John, and bound him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because he married her. For John said to Herod, It is not permitted for thee to have thy brother’s wife (Mark 6:17-18).**

Matthew simply says that Herodias was Philip’s wife. However, Mark says that Herod married Herodias. The Bible gives no other details. Perhaps Herod married her illegally, without her first being divorced from Philip. However, there are other theories that have been offered. But whatever was the reason, John told Herod it was not permitted for him to have Herodias. And that was why Herod had John bound in prison.

Herodias wanted to kill John

- **And Herodias was resentful toward him, and wanted to kill him. And she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. And having heard of him—the many things he was doing—he even heard of him gladly (Mark 6:19-20).**

Matthew says that Herod also wanted to kill John (see Matthew 14:5). However, that was no doubt because of Herodias. For it is common knowledge how much influence a woman can have on a man, causing him to do things he would not otherwise. Remember, that even happened to Adam with his wife Eve, because Paul said that Adam was not deceived by the serpent: **“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, having been deceived, became in transgression”** (First Timothy 2:14).

I can understand why Herod would gladly hear of John, because John was a very dynamic and outspoken man. Why Herod feared John is not as clear. The text says that Herod knew John was a righteous and holy man. And he even protected him.

The reason Herod feared and protected John was probably because John had such a large following among the people, and they considered him a prophet. And every ruler fears what the multitudes can do when they are aroused in anger. For example, when Jesus asked the chief priests and elders of the people about the immersion of John, the record says, **“And they deliberated with themselves, saying, If we should say, From heaven, he will say to us, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we should say, From men, we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet”** (Matthew 21:25-26).

We know that Herod was never deterred from harming a man just because he was righteous and holy. For the book of Acts tells how he later killed James the brother of the apostle John, and he also tried to kill Peter. Herod must have learned that Christians would not cause an uprising even when they are persecuted. Therefore, he had no fear of them.

Herodias found a way to kill John

- **And having become an opportune day, when Herod on his birthday made a dinner for his chiefs, and the high captains, and the leading men of Galilee, and the daughter of her (of Herodias) having come in and danced, and having pleased Herod and those who sat with the king, he said to the maiden, Ask of me whatever thou may want, and I will give to thee. And he swore to her, Whatever thou may ask of me, I will give to thee, as much as half of my kingdom.**
- **And having gone out, she said to her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the immerser. And having come in straightaway with haste to the king, she asked, saying, I want that thou may give me, of it on a platter, the head of John the immerser. And the king, who became exceeding sorry, did not want to refuse her because of the oaths, and of those dining together.**

- **And straightaway having sent an executioner, the king commanded his head to be brought. And having departed, he beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the maiden. And the maiden gave it to her mother (Mark 6:21-28).**

Herod had no doubt been drinking and was under the influence of too much alcohol. Hence, he made that foolish vow, and Herodias saw her opportunity. Herodias probably persuaded her daughter by telling her that she would give her more than Herod would. For Herod would only give her one gift one time, while Herodias would give her many gifts for a longer period of time. And a wife like Herodias has the power to get many things from their husbands. The story reveals the evil mentalities of Herod, Herodias, and her daughter. They were all three very wicked and vicious, driven completely by selfishness.

Herod would not give more than half of his kingdom, because if he gave more than half that would mean he would lose control of it. Also I suspect that was a common expression in those days referring figuratively to a very large gift. Matthew does not even mention that amount, saying simply that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she would ask.

Herod did not like her request, but he would not deny her. He did not want to deny her because he swore in the presence of those dining there, which included his chiefs, and high captains, and leading men of Galilee. Had he denied her it would have seemed (1) to be a sign of weakness, unable to give her the head of John the immerser, or (2) that his word was unreliable, not even keeping his oaths.

John's disciples buried him

- **And when his disciples heard, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a sepulcher (Mark 6:29).**

Even though our dead bodies are only of the dust of the earth, respect for the dead body of a righteous man is a righteous thing, and righteous people do it.

The apostles return

- **And the apostles gather together to Jesus, and reported all to him, and how many things they did, and how many things they taught. And he said to them, Come ye yourselves in private into a desolate place, and rest a while. For there were many coming and going, and they had no opportunity even to eat. And they departed in the boat to a desolate place in private.**
- **And they saw them going. And many recognized him, and ran together on foot there from all the cities. And they went before them, and came together to him. And Jesus having come out, he saw a great multitude. And he felt compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:30-34).**

That passage is about when his apostles had returned from having been sent forth by Jesus to preach and to heal. Jesus was always completely unselfish. And for the benefit of his apostles he sought to go into a desolate place for them to rest. Notice how the passage says they did not even have an opportunity to eat because of the multitudes. Remember, because of his reputation as a healer, Jesus could not even enter openly into a city (see Mark 1:45).

Jesus had great compassion for the multitudes. They were the poor and the afflicted of the land. And like sheep without a shepherd they were troubled and dejected. The poor and afflicted of the ancient world were especially weak and vulnerable. We of the modern developed world with our many social services have little reason to feel the kind of trouble and dejection they felt.

Feeding a great multitude

- **And now many an hour having come to pass, his disciples having come to him, they say, The place is desolate, and it is now many an hour. Send them away, so that after going into the fields and villages around, they may buy loaves for themselves, for they do not have what they may eat. But having answered, he said to them, Give ye them to eat. And they say to him, After departing, shall we buy loaves of two hundred denarii, and give them to eat?**
- **And he says to them, How many loaves have ye? Go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to sit down, all by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.**
- **And after taking the five loaves and the two fishes, having looked up to heaven, he blessed, and broke the loaves in pieces, and he gave to the disciples so that they might set before them. And he distributed the two fishes to them all. And they all ate, and were filled (Mark 6:35-42).**

His disciples were concerned about the people's need to eat because the time was late in the day. When they asked Jesus to send the people out to the villages to purchase food, Jesus told his disciples to feed them. They knew it was impossible for them because they only had five loaves and two fishes. But as Jesus said about another occasion, **"With men, impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible"** (Mark 10:27). Therefore he prepared to feed them.

Commanding the people to sit on the grass in groups, by hundreds and by fifties, served to better organize such a large multitude, and also make it better for cooking the fish. Having them in such groups would have been a more convenient size for the many fires needed to cooking. For the fish were no doubt cooked before being eaten to make the meat more edible. That is indicated by this passage about a time Jesus appeared to some of his apostles after his resurrection: **"So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals set, and fish laying on it, and bread"** (John 21:9).

After the people were settled in the groups, then Jesus prayed a blessing upon the loaves and fishes. He then broke them in pieces for his disciples to distribute to the people. And the loaves and fishes that Jesus were given were not used up until there was enough to feed all the people.

There is a story in the Old Testament that is similar to that miracle. It involves the prophet Elisha, who is referred to in the passage as the man of God: **“And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, Give to the people that they may eat.**

“And his servant said, What, should I set this before a hundred men? But he said, Give to the people that they may eat, for thus says Jehovah, They shall eat, and shall leave of it. So he set it before them, and they ate, and left of it according to the word of Jehovah” (Second Kings 4:42-44). Jesus fed fifty times more people with even less food that Elisha was given.

No waste or litter

- **And they took up fragments, twelve baskets full, and from the fishes. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men** (Mark 6:43-44).

There was no waste of that surplus food, nor was any of it left behind as rubbish on the ground. It is sin to waste and litter. Notice also in that passage that only men were numbered. God has never sanctioned equality of women with men, except in our potential to become sons of God for eternity.

Jesus prays on a mountain in private

- **And straightaway he compelled his disciples to enter into the boat, and to go ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he himself would send the crowd away. And after sending them away, he departed onto the mountain to pray** (Mark 6:45-46).

Jesus obviously wanted some time of privacy. Therefore, he sent his disciples ahead of him to cross the lake. He also dismissed the multitudes because night was approaching. And by nightfall he was alone. Why he went up onto the mountain to pray is not explained. Perhaps that symbolized being closer to his Father in heaven.

The Bible mentions several times that Jesus prayed, sometimes in public and sometimes in private. Prayer is something we all should do whenever there are convenient times. Actually, we should always try to keep God in our thoughts, even if only in the background while concentrating on other things. For Paul said, **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing”** (First Thessalonians 5:16-17).

Jesus walks upon the sea

- **And having become evening, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was**

against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he comes to them, walking on the sea, and wanted to passed by them. But they, when they saw him walking on the sea, supposed it to be a ghost, and cried out. For they all saw him, and were troubled.

- **And straightaway he spoke with them, and says to them, Cheer up. It is I, fear not. And he went up to them into the boat, and the wind ceased. And they were exceedingly amazed in themselves, extraordinarily so. And they wondered, for they did not understand about the loaves, for their heart was hardened (Mark 6:47-52).**

Jesus did not walk on the sea to make life easier for himself. It was to spare his disciples from having to come back to get him. Moreover, he did not fly effortlessly across the water; he walked. And walking always requires some effort, especially if the terrain is rough. And the water was indeed very rough and wavy, so much so that that Matthew says it buffeted the boat (see Matthew 14:24). Therefore, think not that even though Jesus walked on the sea his path was smooth and level, and his walking was easy.

Being in the dark of night it was natural for his disciples to think they were seeing a ghost. And we would all be alarmed if we thought we saw a ghost in the night. Jesus did not rebuke them for those natural reactions, but instead encouraged them and revealed himself. God (the Son of God) knows what it is like to live in this world of darkness and danger. He lived here with us.

That experience was another of the many wonders Jesus performed that only a few of his disciples were able to see. Nevertheless, we can all see those things through the eyes of our faith in their testimony. And the stronger our faith the clearer we can see them, although of course not in their literal detail, which is irrelevant for us anyway.

Wanting to just touching his garment

- **And having crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. And when they came out of the boat, straightaway, having recognized him, after running around that whole region around, they began to carry about on beds those who were faring badly, where they heard he was there.**
- **And wherever he entered, into villages or cities or fields, they laid those who were feeble in the marketplaces, and besought him that if they might but touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched him were being healed (Mark 6:53-56).**

By this time Jesus' reputation as a healer was widely known, and wherever he went people brought sick people for him to heal. And his power was so great that merely touching the hem of his garment healed them. Remember how the woman with the issue of blood was healed by simply touching the edge of his garment (see Mark 5:28-29). The woman was healed because of power that Jesus had. For when it happened, he said, **"Who touched me? For I perceived power having gone forth from me"** (Luke 8:46).

Jesus had that power because God was with him, as he said to his apostles, **“The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). Hence, as many of the sick that touched him, even his garment, were healed.

The land of Gennesaret was a fertile plain on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, about half way between Tiberius and Capernaum.

The tradition of washings

- **And the Pharisees, and some of the scholars, having come from Jerusalem, gathered in to him. And having seen some of his disciples eating their loaves with profane hands, that is, unwashed, they accused them.**
- **(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, unless they wash their hands carefully, do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders. And coming from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they bathe. And there are many other things that they have taken in to retain: washings of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and beds.)** (Mark 7:1-4).

Certain kinds of cleanliness were indeed commanded in the law of Moses. However, as usual the Jews extended those laws to create many additional traditions. The Jews were like a drunkard who cannot walk a straight line. They overextended some laws, and completely ignored or neglected others. But alas, the ones they ignored were the most important. That is reflected in what Jesus said in this passage from Luke: **“But woe to you Pharisees! Because ye tithe mint and rue and every plant, and pass by justice and the love of God. It is necessary to do these things, and not to neglect those things”** (Luke 11:42).

Hypocrisy about obeying God

- **Then the Pharisees and the scholars demand of him, Why do thy disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?**
- **And having answered, he said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me. But in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For having set aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men: washings of pots and cups and many other such like things ye do.**
- **And he said to them, Well do ye reject the commandment of God, so that ye may keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother, and, He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him perish in death. But ye say, If a man should say to his father or mother, Whatever ye might be benefited from me is Corban, that is, an offering, then ye no longer allow**

him to do anything for his father or his mother, annulling the word of God by your tradition that ye have delivered. And many such like things ye do (Mark 7:5-13).

The scholars and Pharisees said that a man's offerings could annul God's commandment that he was to give support to his father and mother. Those men were hypocrites who coveted the recognition and gifts they received more than caring for needy fathers and mothers.

Honoring traditions more than the commands of God is still very commonly done, even among those who claim to follow Jesus. The traditions of men have been, and continue to be major causes of division among believers. And Jesus gave the reason why when he quoted the words of Isaiah: **"... this people draw near me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but have removed their heart far from me, but in vain they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men"** (Isaiah 29:13).

Their hearts are far distant from God because they prefer their own ways of obeying him, which ways are in vain. Among believers in Christ, the two most common of those vain ways are (1) allowing their religious leaders to think for them and tell them what to do, and (2) believing the doctrines of salvation by faith only, which dismisses things like immersion in water for the remission of sins as being unnecessary.

Explaining what defiles a man

- **And having summoned all the people, he said to them, Hear me all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside the man, entering into him that can defile him, but the things coming out of him those are the things that defile the man. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear (Mark 7:14-16).**

What Jesus said about being defiled was not to be understood in the physical sense. For it is undeniable that toxic things taken into the mouth are harmful to the body. Jesus was emphasizing the greater importance of spiritual cleanliness over material cleanliness. And the toxic things coming out of a man's heart are what defile his spirit. Jesus explained those things more fully in the next passage.

Jesus told all the people to hear him and understand. Yet after his comment about things defiling a man, he also said that if any man has ears to hear, let him hear. Jesus invited them all to hear him, and he wanted them all to understand. However, he knew that not all of them were able. Understanding anything requires a mind properly prepared for it: having ears to hear. That is why it is so very important for us to love truth and righteousness, and study the word of God. For the more we learn about it and desire its teachings the more we can understand; the more we will have ears to hear.

Things from inside the heart

- **And when he entered into a house from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. And he says to them, Are also ye so without understanding? Do ye not perceive that everything outside that enters into**

the man cannot defile him, because it does not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the toilet (making all foods clean)?

- **And he said, That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from inside the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, reviling, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from inside, and defile the man (Mark 7:17-23).**

The things coming out of the mouth are spiritual because they come from the heart. And Jesus listed a few examples of such defiling things. Eating with unwashed hands does not defile the spirit of a man, although it could certainly defile his body.

Mark added in an aside that what Jesus said meant he made **“all foods clean.”** Mark was referring to the many foods that were condemned as unclean by the law of Moses (see Leviticus 11). Nevertheless, even though Jesus eliminated those laws about clean and unclean foods, that does not mean all foods are fit to eat. It simply means we now are free to use our own judgment about them. A good example is the swine, which was forbidden to eat by the law of Moses. Meat from pigs is now considered acceptable because we now know how to properly make that food safe.

Jesus here mentioned thirteen different kinds of evils that defile a man. In this same story reported by Matthew, Jesus listed seven different kinds of evils that defile a man (see Matthew 15:19). Neither Luke nor John mention this story.

The example of things that defile a man Jesus mentioned that are reported here in Mark's biography of him are these:

evil thoughts
adulteries
fornications
murders
thefts
covetings
wickednesses
deceit
licentiousness
an evil eye
reviling
pride
foolishness

The ones mentioned here that were not mentioned by Matthew are these:

covetings
wickednesses
deceit
licentiousness
an evil eye
pride
foolishness

Covetings refer to lusting for what someone else has. The law against covetings was the last of the ten commandments. Coveting is not an act but an attitude of the heart. Nevertheless, as Jesus taught, attitudes of the heart do lead to behaviors, whether good or evil. Wickedness refers to any kind of evil and harmful behavior, especially evil and harm against people. And we call evil men who prey upon others, wicked men.

Deceit is virtually always condemned by those it is used against. However, it is still very commonly practiced by the world. Jesus said the devil was the author of deceit. For speaking of him, Jesus said, **“He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44).

Licentiousness refers to being morally lawless and unrestrained. It is condemned in the world except when the people are spiritually corrupt. And that is happening in my country more and more. The evil eye is only mentioned in this passage of the New Testament. However, Solomon mentions it in two of his proverbs: **“Eat thou not the bread of an evil eye, nor desire thou his dainties”** (Proverbs 23:6), and **“He who has an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not know that want shall come upon him”** (Proverbs 28:22). Those proverbs suggest an evil eye refers to being stingy and greedy. Such things indicate an attitude of complete selfishness.

Pride is perhaps the most deadly of all those evils. For pride can cause a man to commit all the others. Indeed, God said about Satan (the creature responsible for Job’s suffering), **“He beholds everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34).

Foolishness is a result of willfully rejecting knowledge and understanding. It too is a result of a perverted attitude of the heart. And it always eventually leads to destruction and sorrow. Drunkards are victims of foolishness because they willfully stupify their minds with strong drink.

But be thou wise and shun all of those evil things.

The great faith of a Gentile mother

- **And having risen from there, he went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. And having entered into a house, he wanted no man to know it, and yet he could not be hid. For a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, after hearing about him, having come, she fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by race. And she besought him that he would cast out the demon from her daughter.**
- **And Jesus said to her, Allow the children first be filled, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and cast it to the house dogs. But she answered and says to him, Yes, Lord, for even the house dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs. And he said to her, Because of this saying, go thou. The demon has gone out of thy daughter. And having departed to her house, she found the demon having gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed** (Mark 7:24-30).

There are some marvelous lessons in that story. According to Matthew, Jesus first ignored the pleas of the Canaanite woman, then he refused her, saying he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (see Matthew 15:23-24). When she continued to plead, he rebuffed her by saying helping her was like giving the children's bread to dogs.

A woman of less faith would have stormed away angrily at those words. However, she was a wise and righteous woman who believed in Jesus and knew how to persist. For she loved her daughter, and would take any insult just to have her healed. Therefore, she accepted being called a dog. But to further her plea, she told him that even the house dogs get the crumbs. That took a great amount of humility and faith. And it won for her what she requested. And the story about her has been permanently recorded in the Bible.

Therefore, if you have a just cause to plead before God, do not be impatient. Have great faith to humbly persist and wait for the time when God will answer you. Remember the example of that humble Canaanite woman.

Healing a deaf and mute man

- **And again having departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, he came to the sea of Galilee in the midst of the regions of Decapolis. And they bring a deaf, tongue-tied man to him, and they beseech him to lay his hand upon him.**
- **And having taken him from the multitude in private, he put his fingers into his ears, and having spat, he touched his tongue. And having looked up to heaven, he sighed, and says to him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightaway his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosened, and he spoke plainly (Mark 7:31-35).**

Jesus sometimes healed with just a word; sometimes he healed at a distance without even uttering a word; sometimes he just touched the afflicted to heal them; sometimes they just touched him or his garment. In this case he put his fingers into the man's ears, and touched his tongue after having spat. And then he looked up to heaven, sighed, and uttered the word Ephphatha, which means be opened. He touched the man's ears because he was deaf, and he touched the man's tongue because he was mute.

Why Jesus used those different methods to heal is not clear. Notice how Jesus took the man from the multitude in private. He did not use that method to heal publicly. Jesus had his own ways of doing things, and he often did not explain why. One example of a reason he gave for healing at a distance was because of a Centurion's faith (see Matthew 8:5-10). Nevertheless, it is our duty to seek for any lessons that we can find from whatever he said or did.

Continual disobedience

- **And he commanded them that they should tell no man, but as much as he commanded them, so much the more abundantly they proclaimed it. And**

they were exceedingly astonished, saying, He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear, and the mute to speak (Mark 7:36-37).

The disobedience of the people who following Jesus is completely characteristic of the world. For they accept the blessings of God, and they marvel at his great power. Nevertheless, they continue to disobey him. Dear reader, it is good to be grateful for God's blessings, and to marvel at his great power, but we should never disobey him.

Every time we disobey him we grieve his Holy Spirit. For Paul commanded us, **"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye are sealed for a day of redemption"** (Ephesians 4:30). Remember how disobeying Jesus' command not to proclaim his healing caused him to be unable to enter a city openly, but kept him in desolate places (see Mark 1:45).

Therefore, if you love the Lord then always obey him, even if you do not understand why, or if you think you know a better way. When the world does not understand God's commands, and when they think they know better, that is often how they justify their disobedience. Nevertheless remember, we are all going to be judged by our obedience, not our faith. Faith is necessary because it leads to obedience.

Feeding four thousand men

- **In those days, the multitude being very great, and not having what they might eat, Jesus having summoned his disciples, he says to them, I feel compassion toward the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and do not have what they might eat. And if I send them away without food to their house, they will faint on the way, for some of them come from afar. And his disciples answered him, From where will anyone be able to fill these men of loaves here in a desolate place?**
- **And he questioned them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. And after taking the seven loaves, having given thanks, he broke in pieces, and gave to his disciples so that they might place before them. And they place before the crowd. And they had a few small fishes. And having blessed them, he said to also place before them.**
- **And they ate and were filled. And they took up seven hampers of surplus fragments. And those who ate were about four thousand, and he sent them away. And straightaway having entered into the boat with his disciples, he came into the parts of Dalmanutha (Mark 8:1-10).**

Remember, Jesus had earlier fed five thousand men with only five loaves and two fishes, and they took up twelve baskets of the fragments that remained. This time he fed four thousand men with seven loaves and a few small fishes, and they took up seven hampers full of the fragments that remained. The Greek word for basket is different from the one for hamper. Why the two different kinds of containers are mentioned is not told. It is just another one of those interesting but entirely unimportant items of trivia.

Matthew refers to Dalmanutha as Magdala, a town on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The Pharisees seek a sign

- **And the Pharisees came forth, and began to dispute with him, seeking from him a sign from the sky, testing him. And having sighed deeply in his spirit, he says, Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I am telling you if a sign will be given to this generation (Mark 8:11-12).**

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. Mark adds how Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit when they tested him that way. He was no doubt greatly disappointed at their blindness. For he had been giving them many mighty signs by all the great miracles of healing he was doing in their sight. But they absolutely refused to accept that kind of testimony, and demanded some spectacular sign from the sky. The testimony Jesus was giving was the very best kind. For it was not only clear proof he was from God, but it was also practical and compassionate toward the needy.

Therefore, Jesus refused to cater to their childish demands. He gave them a riddle instead, saying, **“Truly I am telling you if a sign will be given to this generation.”** He was indeed telling them through his mighty works of healing what kind of signs would be given to that generation, none of which would include the kind of theatrical spectacle in the sky that they demanded.

The leaven of the Pharisees

- **And having left them, having entered again into a boat, he departed to the other side. And they forgot to take loaves, and they did not have with them in the boat except one loaf. And he commanded them, saying, Take heed, watch for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they deliberated among each other, saying, We have no loaves.**
- **And knowing it Jesus says to them, Why do ye deliberate because ye have no loaves? Do ye not yet perceive nor understand? Have ye your heart still hardened? Having eyes, ye see not, and having ears, ye hear not? And do ye not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did ye take up? They say to him, Twelve. And when the seven for the four thousand, how many hampers full of fragments did ye take up? And they said, Seven. And he said to them, How do ye not understand? (Mark 8:13-21).**

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. The record of that event in this book also includes the rebuke Jesus gave to his disciples for not understanding what he was saying. Their reasoning was flawed because they failed to consider how Jesus was able to feed thousands with just a little food. They were too focused on superficial material things, and did not see the figurative meaning of his words.

Jesus was often disappointed in their lack of understanding. For the record shows that he rebuked them several times for it. And he expects all of us to strive to understand the

deeper meaning of his words. For they are very rich with valuable knowledge and wisdom about things spiritual, just as the elements around us can give us very valuable knowledge and wisdom about things material. Indeed, striving for that material knowledge and wisdom is the goal of science. And consider all of the great material benefits applying that knowledge has given us. Yet the benefits of applying the knowledge and wisdom of things spiritual far exceeds what we can gain from things material.

Jesus heals a blind man

- **And he comes to Bethsaida, and they bring a blind man to him, and call for him so that he might touch him. And having taken the hand of the blind man, he led him outside of the village. And having spat on his eyes, having laid his hands upon him, he questioned him if he sees anything? And having looked up, he said, The men that I see, I see as trees walking.**
- **Then again he put his hands upon his eyes, and made him look up. And he was restored, and saw all men clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Thou may neither go into the village, nor may tell any man in the village (Mark 8:22-26).**

That is another example of the different ways Jesus healed, and it gives an important lesson for us. Many years ago when I was a student working on my doctor's degree I read a book in the library written by a man named Von Senden, a German scientist. It was a report of cases of blind people born with cataracts who later received their sight from the new surgical procedures that were developed near the beginning of the twentieth century. One interesting result was the discovery that much learning is required for the ability to see. And that learning to see takes years to develop.

A brief search on the internet about that book led me to www.ralphmag.org/CO/blind.html. After introducing the book by Von Senden, the author of the website began by saying,

Many doctors had tested their patients' sense perceptions and ideas of space both before and after the operations. The vast majority of patients, of both sexes and all ages, had, in von Senden's opinion, no idea of space whatsoever. Form, distance, and size were so many meaningless syllables. A patient "had no idea of depth, confusing it with roundness."

Below are a few excerpts about von Senden's book that I obtained from that website. They illustrate how difficult it is to see without having the background of much experience with vision.

In general the newly sighted see the world as a dazzle of color-patches. They are pleased by the sensation of color, and learn quickly to name the colors, but the rest of seeing is tormentingly difficult. ...

The mental effort involved in these reasonings proves overwhelming for many patients. It oppresses them to realize, if they ever do at all, the tremendous size of the world, which they had previously conceived of as something touchingly manageable. It oppresses them to realize that they have been visible to people all along, perhaps

unattractively so, without their knowledge or consent. A disheartening number of them refuse to use their new vision, continuing to go over objects with their tongues, and lapsing into apathy and despair. The child can see, but will not make use of his sight. Only when pressed can he with difficulty be brought to look at objects in his neighborhood; but more than a foot away it is impossible to bestir him to the necessary effort. ...

Of a twenty-one-year-old girl, the doctor relates, "Her unfortunate father, who had hoped for so much from this operation, wrote that his daughter carefully shuts her eyes whenever she wishes to go about the house, especially when she comes to a staircase, and that she is never happier or more at ease than when, by closing her eyelids, she relapses into her former state of total blindness." ...

A fifteen-year-old boy, who was also in love with a girl at the asylum for the blind, finally blurted out, "No, really, I can't stand it any more; I want to be sent back to the asylum again. If things aren't altered, I'll tear my eyes out." ...

On the other hand, many newly sighted people speak well of the world, and teach us how dull is our own vision. To one patient, a human hand, unrecognized, is "something bright and then holes." Shown a bunch of grapes, a boy calls out, "It is dark, blue and shiny. ... It isn't smooth, it has bumps and hollows." ...

A little girl visits a garden. "She is greatly astonished, and can scarcely be persuaded to answer, stands speechless in front of the tree, which she only names on taking hold of it, and then as 'the tree with the lights in it.'" Some delight in their sight and give themselves over to the visual world. Of a patient just after her bandages were removed, her doctor writes, "The first things to attract her attention were her own hands; she looked at them very closely, moved them repeatedly to and fro, bent and stretched the fingers, and seemed greatly astonished at the sight." ...

Some of those patients did persevere and eventually learned to use their vision, but few of them ever saw things normally, especially the older ones. The younger they were the better chance they had.

The quotation in Mark about the former blind man seeing men as trees walking gives us an important lesson; namely that vision requires not only healthy eyes, but also much experience using them. The first thing the blind man saw were men as trees walking. That means his eyes were healed, but without normal vision. Jesus then gave him the equivalent of a lifetime of seeing, so that his ability to see would be completely normal.

Men are now able to give some blind people the first stage of vision, but they will never be able to do what Jesus did and give the second stage of vision. That is more evidence that Jesus truly was from God.

I need to mention what Von Senden said about one of them: "One girl was eager to tell her blind friend that 'men do not really look like trees at all,' and astounded to discover that her every visitor had an utterly different face." That girl must have first thought men looked like trees, the way the blind man did after Jesus first touched him. And then after some experiences with her eyes she began to see that "men do not really look like trees at all."

Who men thought Jesus was

- **And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he questioned his disciples, saying to them, Who do men say that I am? And they answered, saying, John the immerser, and others, Elijah, but others, one of the prophets** (Mark 8:27-28).

God does not reveal himself to the world to make his existence obvious. He certainly could. He could make his existence even more obvious to the world than the sun is in the sky. He does not make his existence obvious to the world because he want us to search for him.

When Paul was speaking to the Athenians, he told how God wants us to search for him: **“The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things.**

“And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us. For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring” (Acts 17:24-28).

Requiring us to grope for him to find him is one way he tests the character of our spirits. And the testing of the worthiness of our spirit is a major purpose of our existence in the world. Worthy souls will search to find God because they seek things higher and nobler than those of the world.

Therefore, Jesus did not publicly proclaim himself to be the Christ, the Son of God. Scoffers say he did not proclaim himself because he doubted who he was. They are liars who deny the truth of the Bible record which says he did. They deny the truth of the word of God because they do not know God. Indeed, they do they want to know him, because they hate his ways.

Most of the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Christ. Some confused him with John the immerser. Some thought he was the reincarnation of a former prophet of God. But they all recognized him as a prophet. Most other men did not recognize him as the Christ because they had a misconception about what the Christ would be like. They expected the Christ of God, the Messiah, to be a great and mighty warrior-king who would bring Israel to greatness in the world. Jesus was nothing like that.

The true Christ of God came to establish a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God, not a kingdom of the world. As he said to Pilate the governor during his trial, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here”** (John 18:36).

Peter knew who Jesus was

- **And he says to them, But who do ye say that I am? And having answered, Peter says to him, Thou art the Christ. And he chided them that they should tell no man about him (Mark 8:29-30).**

Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God because of the evidence. For one thing, John the immerser testified that Jesus was the Son of God: **“And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou wilt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God”** (John 1:32-34).

Peter not only believed the testimony of John, but he had seen other evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Indeed, as Jesus said, God the Father himself had testified about him. God revealed to the people who Jesus was, not with words but with power. Peter and the other apostles had seen Jesus perform many mighty signs and wonders that could only have been done with the power of God.

Jesus mentioned God’s testimony of him to the Jews, when he said, **“But I have testimony greater than of John [the immerser], for the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me”** (John 5:36).

Nevertheless, it took great courage for Peter to confess Jesus as the Christ, because the Jews excommunicated from the synagogue every man who did, as this passage tells: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43).

Jesus chided them that they should tell no man about him because he did not yet want to be revealed broadly. Jesus apparently chose to mingle freely with the people during the time of his ministry without the restrictions and other problems of being enthroned. Therefore, he did not yet want the population to be told he was the Christ.

Consider what happened when he fed the five thousand: **“When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone”** (John 6:14-15).

Warning them about his suffering and death

- **And he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of man to suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scholars, and be killed, and after three days to rise (Mark 8:31).**

Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his suffering and death by the rulers of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus also encouraged them by saying he would be raised the third day.

Jesus knew how stressful his crucifixion would be for them. Not only would it be a great challenge to their faith, but their lives would be in danger because of their association with him. The Jewish rulers were vicious men, like modern crime bosses, who wanted to destroy them.

However, his disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying. For Luke's biography of Jesus says, **"And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not understand the things that were said"** (Luke 18:34). It was apparently too incredible for them to believe.

Peter and Jesus rebuke each other

- **And he spoke the matter openly. And having taken him aside, Peter began to rebuke him. But he, having turned around, and having looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Go thee behind me, Satan, because thou think not the things of God, but the things of men** (Mark 8:32-33).

Peter was convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and he was full of zeal for him. However, his zeal was sometimes misguided, and this time it caused him to contradict Jesus.

Peter rebuked Jesus for saying those things about being killed, because he did not understand the necessity of Jesus suffering that way. However, instead of explaining to Peter why that must happen, Jesus rebuked him. He turned his back on Peter and commanded him to get behind him. He even called him Satan (which word means adversary) for thinking the things of men and not the things of God.

Peter also contradicted Jesus during the last supper when Jesus said they would all forsake him that night. Peter said he would never deny him. However, Peter did deny him that very night, not once but thrice. And that taught Peter an essential lesson for him, because it made him more humble. It also taught him to never contradict anything Jesus said, regardless of what it was. And we should do the same, including any of his commandments, even if we do not understand the reason for them. If we believe in him then we must trust him without always needing to understand.

Losing our lives to save them

- **And having called in the multitude with his disciples, he said to them, Whoever wants to follow behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life because of me and the good news, this man will save it** (Mark 8:34-35).

Jesus told those words about denying ourselves after rebuking Peter for opposing his death by the rulers of the Jews. Jesus said we must lose our lives for his sake in order to find them. But of course, that does not mean we must all literally die. It means we must give up everything that is not part of his righteousness, everything that is selfish about us, everything that is an advantage to us in the world of sin.

Notice how Jesus said whoever will lose his life because of him and the good news. It is only by losing our lives for the cause of Christ and his good news that we will save it.

And remember, taking up our cross means enduring the trials and tribulations of living a faithful Christian life, regardless of what they may be. It means being longsuffering in our obedience to him. It means accepting whatever hardships we face in living for him and promoting his kingdom and his righteousness. Losing our lives that way enables us to find eternal life. For Jesus said to the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). That is truly finding life—for all who believe and obey him.

What will it profit a man

- **For what will it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?** (Mark 8:36-37).

Losing our soul to gain the whole world is a very bad and foolish bargain. Remember what Solomon said about living in this world: **“I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind”** (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14).

The very best we can have in this life is a few years of fleeting pleasure. And relative to eternity the longest life in this world is but a moment.

Indeed, as Jesus indicated, there is nothing so valuable that is worth losing our soul. For each one of us the most valuable thing we have is our soul. It is our eternal identity, and the most valuable thing we could ever gain for it is eternal life as sons of God in heaven. Every man will realize that on the day of judgment after this world is over. But for those who deny him in this life it will be too late.

And disobeying his commandments is denying him, regardless of what a man says with his lips. As the apostle John said, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man. But whoever keeps his word, truly in this man the love of God is fully perfected. By this we know that we are in him”** (First John 2:3-5).

Being ashamed of Jesus

- **For whoever may be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy agents** (Mark 8:38).

There are many people during this spiritually decadent generation of Americans who are ashamed of Jesus. I never thought I would see how viciously and widely Jesus is now been attacked. And the sinful rulers of our government have given taxpayer money to finance some of the most blasphemous of those attacks.

It is even dangerous now for scientists, educators, corporate leaders, and many other people to confess their faith in him and his holy word. For they lose their reputations with their colleagues when they do. Even many of those who claim to believe what he taught are ashamed to confess it beyond the confines of their church. And if they find it convenient to claim him publicly, they limit themselves to only saying they believe. There are a few courageous souls who still honor and proclaim the truth about him publicly, but they are few in number because the truth of what he taught is so unpopular.

The kingdom was coming soon

- **And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some of those who have stood here, who will, no, not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power (Mark 9:1).**

Jesus was given his kingdom when he completed his sinless life in obedience to the Father. And since he appeared to some of his disciples after he was resurrected, that is how they saw him coming in his kingdom. After his ascension into heaven his apostles established his church, which is his kingdom on the earth. Remember, Peter was given the keys to open its gates (see Matthew 16:19).

The kingdom of God was established in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here is how it first began: **“And while fulfilling the day of Pentecost, they [the disciples] were all together at the same place. And suddenly there developed a sound from the sky as of a forceful wind moving, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them dividing tongues, as of fire, and they settled upon each one of them. And they were all filled of the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them to declare” (Acts 2:1-4).**

Moreover, God’s Holy Spirit gave the early church power to perform miracles during that developmental period. However, now that the New Testament is available, those powers are no longer given because they are no longer needed. The testimony of the word of God itself is sufficient to develop faith in Christ and his good news of our salvation.

Jesus is transfigured

- **And after six days Jesus takes Peter and James and John, and leads them up onto a high mountain alone, in private. And he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, exceedingly white, as snow, such as no fuller on earth is able to whiten. And Elijah with Moses appeared to them, and they were talking with Jesus.**
- **And having responded, Peter says to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And we could make three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he knew not what he would say, for they were frightened. And a cloud developed overshadowing them. And a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved Son. Hear ye him.**

- **And suddenly having looked around, they saw no man anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. And as they were coming down from the mountain, he commanded them that they should tell no man what they saw, except when the Son of man will rise from the dead (Mark 9:2-9).**

The main lesson in that story is the superiority of Christ. Moses symbolized the law, and Elijah symbolized the prophets. And the law and the prophets symbolize the Old Testament. For example, when Jesus spoke what we call the golden rule, he said, **“All things therefore, as many as ye may want that men should do to you, so also do ye to them, for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12). In other words, that rule epitomizes the teachings of the Old Testament.

When Peter put Moses and Elijah equal with Christ, God spoke directly to tell him that Jesus was superior to all. For he was God’s beloved Son, and what he taught supersedes the law and the prophets.

That was the second time the record tells how God spoke directly from heaven to say that he was well pleased with his beloved Son. The first time was when Jesus was immersed by John: **“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was immersed by John in the Jordan. And straightaway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens divided, and the Spirit descending upon him as a dove. And a voice occurred out of the heavens, Thou are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (Mark 1:9-11).

Why Jesus only took Peter, James, and John with him on the mountain is not told. However, Paul did speak later of them as being known as pillars, when he said, **“But from those who were reputed to be something (what kind they were formerly, it makes no difference to me, God does not accept a personage of man), for those who were of repute added nothing to me, but to the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the good news for men of uncircumcision, as Peter for men of circumcision (for he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles), and James and Cephas [Peter] and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, when they understood the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship”** (Galatians 2:6-9).

Paul said that Peter, James, and John were reputed to be pillars. However, he also said that God does not accept a personage of man. Therefore, Peter, James, and John being pillars indicates they were considered by Jesus as being more worthy of recognition. And that would explain why he chose them to see his transfiguration.

Not understanding about his resurrection

- **And they kept the saying to themselves, discussing what is the rising from the dead (Mark 9:10).**

The passage indicates they (Peter, James, and John) did not understand what Jesus meant by rising from the dead, but they kept the saying to themselves. There were times when the apostles were afraid to keep questioning Jesus about something that he said, because he sometimes rebuked them for not understanding.

Here is what Luke's biography of Jesus said about his apostles when Jesus told them how he was going to suffer and be killed: **"And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not understand the things that were said"** (Luke 18:34).

John was the Elijah prophesied

- **And they questioned him, saying, The scholars say that Elijah must first come. And having answered, he said to them, Elijah indeed comes first and restores all things. And how it is written for the Son of man, that he would suffer many things and be rejected. But I say to you, that Elijah has also come, and they did to him as much as they wanted, just as it is written for him** (Mark 9:11-13).

The book of Malachi is the last one in the Old Testament, and its last words speak of God sending Elijah: **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"** (Malachi 4:5-6).

Elijah was a prophet of God, and he was one of only two men that the Bible says were taken directly to heaven without ever having died. For the record says, **"And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and his assistant Elisha] still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which divided them both apart. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"** (Second Kings 2:11).

When Jesus' disciples asked him about the prophecy of Elijah coming, he told them that Elijah had already come. Jesus said that Elijah had already come but they did not recognize him and they persecuted him. The disciples then knew he was speaking about John the immerser. John came in the spirit of Elijah, not in his flesh. And the Jews did not understand that. They expected the literal body of Elijah, because Elijah had been taken into heaven directly without ever having died.

Scholars dispute with his disciples

- **And when they came to the disciples he saw a great multitude around them, and scholars disputing with them. And straightaway all the multitude, having noticed him, were startled. And running near they greeted him. And he questioned the scholars, What are ye disputing with them?** (Mark 9:14-16).

The record does not say what those scholars were disputing with his disciples about. However, since his disciples had been unable to heal a boy brought to them, the dispute was probably about that. Because the next passage tells how the boy's father answered Jesus' question about the disputing by telling him how his disciples could not heal his son.

The scholars may have been denying the ability of the disciples to heal, which the disciples were defending. For remember, Jesus had sent them out to preach, to heal, and to cast

out demons (see Matthew 10). And when they returned they rejoiced about how they had that power during the mission (see Luke 10:17). The disciples were probably testifying about how they had healed in the past, but the scholars were denying it. Nevertheless, that is only a conjecture about the dispute, because the record is silent about it.

His disciples could not heal a boy

- **And having answered, one from the multitude said, Teacher, I brought my son to thee, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it tears him, and he foams, and gnashes his teeth, and becomes limp. And I spoke to thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they were not able** (Mark 9:17-18).

The man's son was apparently suffering some kind of epilepsy caused by an unclean spirit. While Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, his other disciples attempted unsuccessfully to cast it out, although they had successfully cast out demons when Jesus sent them out previously to proclaim the kingdom of God.

This story about the afflicted boy is also mentioned in the biography of Jesus by Matthew: **"And when they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling to him, and saying, Lord, be merciful to my son, because he is lunatic, and suffers badly. For he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not heal him"** (Matthew 17:14-16).

It is also mention in the one by Luke: **"And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, saying, Teacher, I beseech thee to look upon my son, because he is the only begotten to me. And lo, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out, and it convulses him with foaming. And it departs from him difficultly, injuring him. And I begged thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they could not"** (Luke 9:38-40).

Both Mark and Luke say the father blamed a spirit (an evil spirit) for his son's illness, while in the record by Matthew the father simply says the boy was lunatic. Mark also says the boy had a mute spirit.

The different biographies of Jesus provide a variety of information about his life. And that enables us to understand him better. For it is always better to examine anything from several different views or perspectives. The different testimonies also strengthen our faith that he was the Son of God. For the testimony of several men is always more powerful and convincing than the testimony of one.

Jesus rebuked that generation

- **And having answered him, he says, O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me** (Mark 9:19).

It is not clear why Jesus made that rebuke. He was certainly disappointed with the multitudes. For example, he once said to them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled"** (John 6:26). That was the day after he had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes.

He also said to the people of Jerusalem, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I wanted to gathered thy children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not”** (Matthew 23:37).

Perhaps that rebuke about the faithless and perverted generation was because his disciples also showed lack of faith. Jesus had such a powerful faith in his heavenly Father that he was no doubt deeply disappointed about how little faith even his chosen apostles had.

And I fear his rebuke can apply to all of us. Are we not all faithless and perverted compared with what we could be? I certainly feel that way. As Paul said, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23). There are countless ways I have fallen short of the glory of God. Yet I cannot brood about my past sins and failures. I must keep striving to do better.

The boy's father describes his illness

- **And they brought him to him. And when he saw him, straightaway the spirit convulsed him. And having fallen on the ground, he wallowed, foaming. And he questioned his father, How much time is it since this has happened to him? And he said, From childhood. And it often casts him both into the fire and into the waters so that it might destroy him** (Mark 9:20-22).

The boy had the symptoms of epilepsy, but the Bible record says he was possessed by a demon. The boy was probably an adolescent, because his father said he had been afflicted from childhood. His father thought the evil spirit wanted to destroy his son. But I suspect such evil creatures probably just enjoy tormenting their victims, just as many evil men have always done.

With faith all things are possible

- **But if thou can do anything, help us, having compassion toward us. And Jesus said to him, If thou are able to believe, all things are possible to him who believes. And straightaway the father of the child having cried out, he said with tears, I believe. Lord, help thou my unbelief** (Mark 9:22-24).

It is understandable why the boy's father was not certain that Jesus could help them, because his disciples had failed even though they thought they could. The reaction of the boy's father to Jesus' statement about faith making all things possible shows the depth of the man's love for his son, and how desperately he wanted him healed.

And his plea for Jesus to help his unbelief is one that we all need to make continually, because the devil and his disciples never stop trying to destroy our faith. Even though we believe, yet our faith is too often inadequate, containing elements of unbelief. Therefore, it is good for us to plead that the Lord will help us defeat whatever unbelief we have that remains to hinder us.

Jesus cast out the unclean spirit

- **And when Jesus saw that a crowd was running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, Thou mute and deaf spirit, I command thee to come out of him, and enter into him no more. And having cried out, and having convulsed him much, it came out. And he became as if dead, so as for many to say that he was dead. But having taken him by the hand, Jesus lifted him up, and he arose (Mark 9:25-27).**

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running together, he did not delay, but immediately rebuked the unclean spirit, and commanded it to come out of the child and stay out. Unorganized crowds are virtually always undesirable. Crowds like that are very vulnerable to taking on a life of their own, which is always a more lawless and barbaric life, dangerous to those in them. Therefore, they should be avoided.

Jesus called that evil spirit, mute and deaf. His father only said he had a mute spirit, but muteness is almost always caused by deafness. The fact that the evil spirit convulsed the boy much before coming out is an indication of how vicious and rebellious that spirit was. He convulsed him with so much violence that the boy became as if dead. But Jesus would never have allowed the boy to die, and he helped the boy to rise up.

Dear reader, the sinners of the world scoff at the claim that such disorders can be caused by evil spirits. But that is because the spirit of the devil works in them (see Ephesians 2:2). Remember, there are many mysterious things about this world. And the existence and influence of demons is one of them.

Be not like the scoffers of the ancient and medieval times who belittled the laws of Moses about cleanliness. For they had no knowledge of the existence of dangerous microorganisms that breed in uncleanness. Do not scoff about the existence of evil spirits just because you do not understand them. I speak much more about evil spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus explains why they could not cast it out

- **And when he came into the house, his disciples questioned him privately, We were not able to cast it out. And he said to them, This kind can come out by nothing, except by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:28-29).**

Jesus' disciples were puzzled why they could not cast out the demon. Remember, they were able to cast them out when he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. Jesus told them that kind of demon does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

Perhaps the reason Jesus was so disappointed with his disciples was because they were too quick to give up trying. For if they had engaged in prayer and fasting then they could have cast the demon out. And one lesson for us is that we should persevere in our righteousness, and not be too quick to give up on a good work. Keep looking for what it takes.

Not wanting any to know

- **And having departed from there, they passed through Galilee, and he did not want that any man would know it** (Mark 9:30).

The reason Jesus did not want any man to know he was passing through Galilee is probably because he knew it would attract great multitudes. And since he was going to Jerusalem where he would allow himself to be betrayed and crucified, he obviously did not want the burden of them to interfere with that final mission, which was commanded him by the Father. And since he was to be crucified at the time of the Passover feast, he could not be delayed on that final journey.

Paul told how Jesus was the Passover for his disciples, sacrificing himself to save our souls: **“Purge out the old leaven, so that ye may be a new lump, since ye are unleavened. For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”** (First Corinthians 5:7).

Jesus prophesies his death and resurrection

- **For he taught his disciples, and said to them, The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And after being killed, he will rise the third day. But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to question him** (Mark 9:31-32).

Many times Jesus told his apostles how he was going to be killed and then be resurrected. This passage is just one more example. They never did understand until after it happened.

Who is greater

- **And he came to Capernaum. And having become in the house he questioned them, What were ye deliberating among yourselves on the way? But they were silent, for on the way they discussed among each other, who is greater. And having sat down, he called the twelve, and he says to them, If any man wants to be first, he will be last of all, and helper of all** (Mark 9:33-35).

When Jesus asked his apostles what they were deliberating among themselves on the way, they did not answer, probably because they were too embarrassed to say. They knew he would not have approved. However, Jesus did not condemn wanting to be greater. He even told them how, but in the form of a riddle. He said, **“If any man wants to be first, he will be last of all, and helper of all.”** That is a riddle because it seems paradoxical: wanting to be first means being last.

What Jesus means is that if we want to be first in our service to Christ, we must be willing to become last of all, and helper of all. Consider the example of his apostles themselves. They were indeed first in their service to Christ, and in being helpers to all of his disciples. However, in so doing they became last in the world.

As Paul said about them, **“For I think God has exhibited us the apostles least, as men sentenced to die, because we became a spectacle to the world, both to agents and to**

men. We are foolish for the sake of Christ, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are esteemed, but we are disreputable.

“As far as the present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are ill clothed, and are treated roughly, and are homeless. And we toil, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being slandered, we entreat. We became as trash of the world, an offscouring of all things, until now” (First Corinthians 4:9-13).

I believe what Jesus said applies to every believer. He who wants to be first in the eyes of Christ must become last of all and helper of all. Therefore, dear reader, if you have that special desire, then prepare yourself to become last of all and helper of all. How those things will happen for different men will no doubt depend upon many circumstances about them. But they will happen if you seek to be first in the kingdom of God. Therefore, prepare yourself to serve people, but to be rejected by most of the world. Otherwise, do not seek to be first. **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 11:15).

Receiving

- **And having taken a child, he set it in the midst of them. And after embracing it, he said to them, Whoever may receive one of such children in my name, receives me, and whoever may receive me, does not receive me, but him who sent me** (Mark 9:36-37).

What Jesus meant by receiving them is to accept and embrace them, although the embracing can be figurative. And when we receive innocent children in the name of Christ, we are receiving him. And when we receive him we are receiving God. Therefore, we should never look down upon innocent children as merely weak and ignorant creatures, but as precious souls associated with Christ himself.

Whoever is not against us is for us

- **And John answered him, saying, Teacher, we saw a certain man, who does not follow us, casting out demons in thy name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not, for there is no man who will do a mighty work in my name, and will be able quickly to speak evil of me. For he who is not against you is for you** (Mark 9:38-40).

We should accept every man who works for righteousness, whether he is particularly associated with us or not. Of course, if such a man is lacking or in error in some way, then it is our duty to help him. It is only when he refuses correction that should we reject him. That was no doubt why casting out demons in Jesus' name did not always work.

For example, consider this amusing story: **“But some of the wandering Jewish exorcists, attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And there were some sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, seven doing this. And having answered, the evil spirit said, I know Jesus and I recognize Paul, but who are ye? And the man in whom was**

the evil spirit, leaping on them, and having overpowered them, he prevailed against them, so as for them to flee out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:13-16).

The apostle Paul had been preaching the good news of Christ in Ephesus for a long time. Yet those seven wandering Jewish exorcists rejected his call to accept Jesus. Apparently all they wanted was to use the power of his name. Consequently, they failed and suffered for it. We should accept every man who is working for righteousness as long as he accepts Christ as well. And that was probably the case of the man whom John wrongfully forbade.

Notice how Jesus said, **“For he who is not against you is for you.”** Jesus also said, **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters”** (Matthew 12:30). Jesus often dichotomized mankind into one of two groups: (1) those who are humble and lowly, who love truth and righteousness, and who have open minds to learn, and (2) those who are proud and self-righteous, who love sin and deceit, and who close their minds to the teachings of his good news.

The first group Jesus called his sheep, and they will join with him as his disciples. Those who are not his sheep work against him and his disciples, and they contribute to the unrighteousness of the world whether they are aware of it or not. Remember however, we all have the choice of belonging to Christ or rejecting him. And those who reject him can still repent and accept him while we have the opportunity in this life, but not in the next one.

Reward and punishment

- **For whoever may give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye are of Christ, truly I say to you, he will, no, not lose his reward** (Mark 9:41).

God rewards even the smallest act of kindness done to those who belong to Christ. God can do anything, and he indeed rules in the affairs of the world. Therefore, he has numerous ways he can reward us in our lives, whether such rewards are great or small. But we rarely see how he does those things. Almost always we see such things happening to us as being coincidental or associated with something else.

Causing to stumble

- **And whoever may cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is good for him instead, if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea** (Mark 9:42).

That was a severe warning against causing a child who believes in Jesus to stumble. Such men will receive a punishment worse than a painful death. Causing a child to stumble means doing anything to cause the child to lose its faith in him or to commit sin.

How much a child can believe in him as our savior depends greatly upon its maturity. However, young children can certainly believe in the fundamentals of truth and righteousness without having a lot of maturity. Recognition and appreciation of truth and righteousness comes early in life. And that may be another meaning of believing in Jesus, because he said, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”** (John 14:6).

Sacrifice whatever causes stumbling

- **And if thy hand may cause thee to stumble, cut it off. It is good for thee to enter into life maimed, than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not perish, and the fire is not quenched.**
- **And if thy foot may cause thee to stumble, cut it off. It is good for thee to enter into life crippled, than having thy two feet to be cast into hell, into the unquenchable fire where their worm does not perish, and the fire is not quenched.**
- **And if thine eye may cause thee to stumble, pluck it out. It is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God one-eyed, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire, where their worm does not perish, and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:43-48).**

Virtually every day there are cases of having parts of the body removed or amputated by surgeons to save a person's life. However, in recent times there was reported the case of a man who literally cut off his own hand to save his life. His hand had become trapped by a fallen boulder while he was alone in a remote mountain wilderness. Being alone, the only way he could save himself was to use his knife to cut it off. Otherwise he would have experienced a lingering death. If people only knew how much greater suffering there is in hell they would indeed cast off whatever would cause them to be cast there.

Words similar to that passage were also recorded in Matthew. Mark adds here comments that Jesus made about the unquenchable fire where their worm does not perish. The unquenchable fire is the furnace of fire called hell.

What Jesus meant by the worm not perishing is a mystery. Perhaps what he meant by the worm was every internal parasite, including germs and viruses. If that is the case, then Jesus is telling us something about hell. Not only will souls there suffer from the unquenchable fire, but they will suffer the affliction of undying parasites within them. How such things will happen is, of course, an even greater mystery. Parasites in hell must be some kind of evil spirits that torment the spirits of sinners. For the spirits of sinners will have no bodies there. I speak much more about hell in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Being salted with fire

- **For every man will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt material. The salt material is good, but if the salt material becomes saltless, by what will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace among each other (Mark 9:49-50).**

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. What Jesus said about us and salt is no doubt figurative, where fire and salt symbolize tribulations and sufferings. Salt is not only a vital

nutrient for our bodies, but it is a valuable preservative. Before modern methods were invented, salt was the major material used to preserve meat.

Interpreting the first sentence of that passage, we could say that the spiritual life of every man must be preserved and nourished by suffering. For Paul taught that it was **“necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22), and, **“... all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (Second Timothy 3:12). Therefore, each one of us should accept the tribulations and persecutions for Christ that are a part of serving him (having salt in ourselves). However, we should always be at peace with each other.

Jesus' comment about not being able to season salt if the salt material becomes saltless, probably refers to avoiding and fleeing from all tribulations and sufferings for the cause of Christ and his righteousness. Not allowing ourselves to experience any tribulations for Christ is like the salt material becoming saltless.

Divorce and hardened hearts

- **And having risen from there, he comes into the borders of Judea through the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes come together to him again, and, as he has practiced, he taught them again.**
- **And the Pharisees having approached, they demanded of him if it is permitted for a man to divorce a wife, testing him. And having answered, he said to them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses permitted to write a document of divorce, and to divorce her.**
- **But having answered, Jesus said to them, For your hard heart he wrote for you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. Because of this a man will leave his father and mother behind, and will be bonded with his wife, and the two will be in one flesh. So then they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, no man shall separate (Mark 10:1-9).**

When Jesus said divorce was not from the beginning, he quoted the description in Genesis about the creation of Eve: **“And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:23-24). Notice how the text says the man and his wife would be one flesh. The man and his wife were to be so strongly united in spirit that it was like being one flesh.

The very best marriage in the sight of God is when a man marries one woman only, and they become permanently united in spirit, so united that they become as one flesh. And that oneness should never be broken except in death. For no man should separate the marriage bond. That command was widely honored in this country until the people decided to reject God and follow the devil.

Only when one of them destroys that oneness of unity by fornication can the innocent one divorce and remarry. For in his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, **“And it was said, Whoever may divorce his wife, let him give her a divorce certificate. But I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife apart from a matter of fornication, disposes her to commit adultery, and whoever may marry her who has been divorced commits adultery”** (Matthew 5:31-32).

However, that ideal oneness that every husband and wife should seek to achieve is not to be an equality, but a working oneness the same way the parts of our body are a oneness. Our head and our hands cannot be given equal authority for control of the body. And God has made the husband to be the head of the wife. For Paul said **“a husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church, and himself the savior of the body”** (Ephesians 5:23). Yet our sinful rulers have robbed husbands of that right, and have given complete equality to their wives.

Notice how Jesus said that God allowed the ancient Israelites to go against his will (about divorce) because of the hardness of their hearts. Since God himself compromised from the ideal of his will, then we have that precedent to make our own compromises. For there are going to be times in our lives when the ideal of righteousness cannot be effectively done because of the hardness of hearts. Knowing when those things happen, and knowing how to compromise within the acceptability of God will take a lot of wisdom and knowledge from the Bible. I mention that occasional necessity of compromise because of the next thing that Jesus said.

Divorce remarriage and adultery

- **And in the house the disciples questioned him again about the same thing. And he says to them, Whoever may divorce his wife, and will marry another, commits adultery against her. And if a woman should divorce her husband, and will be married to another, she commits adultery** (Mark 10:10-12).

According to Jesus marriage is a lifelong commitment. Therefore, divorcing and marrying someone else is the same as adultery. It is adultery because marriage is a lifelong commitment, and divorce cannot invalidate that commitment. Only fornication, sexual intimacy with someone else, can. Fornication invalidates the marriage commitment because it destroys the oneness of the marriage bond.

Notice how Jesus said if a man divorces his wife and will marry another, he commits adultery against her. Adultery was one of the things forbidden in the ten commandments, and it was a capital crime in the law of Moses. Adultery is often called being unfaithful because it is a kind of betrayal. And that betrayal can become especially grievous when it results in the birth of bastards. Therefore, when a man divorces his wife and marries another, he is betraying her; unless she had already betrayed him with fornication.

Jesus said more about divorce in Matthew 19:3-10. You can read more of my comments about divorce there.

Allowing children to come to him

- **And they brought children to him, so that he would touch them. And the disciples rebuked those who were bringing them. But when Jesus saw it, he was displeased, and said to them, Allow the children to come to me. Forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it. And having embraced them, while laying his hands upon them, he blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).**

When Jesus said about children, **“of such is the kingdom of God,”** he did not, of course, mean the kingdom of God was composed only of children. We must be as a child, because he said whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it. That means to enter the kingdom we must become as children in the nature of our spirit: innocent (in the sense of repenting of sin), humble, open-minded, eager to learn, quick to forgive and forget minor offenses.

He did not mean that we should become as children in our intellectual development and emotional control. As Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I reasoned as a child, but when I became a man, I abolished the childish things”** (First Corinthians 13:11), and, **“Brothers, become not children in your thoughts. Instead be childlike in wickedness, but in your thoughts become mature”** (First Corinthians 14:20).

No man who lacks the kind of childlike spirit that Jesus referred to will ever enter into the kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus even said that those who make themselves the humblest and the lowliest among us are the greater in the kingdom. That is the very opposite of what happens in the world. It is the most proud, aggressive, and self-promoting men who become the greater within the peoples of the world.

None is good except one

- **And as he was going forth on the way, one man having ran to him, and having knelt to him, questioned him, Good teacher, what should I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, Why do thou call me good? None is good except one, God (Mark 10:17-18).**

That is more evidence that Jesus is not fully equal with God the Father. He confessed that fact numerous times, many of which are recorded in the biography of him written by the apostle John. Only God the Father is absolutely “good,” meaning perfect in every way. For example, God can never be tempted (see James 1:13), but Jesus certainly was.

Be obedient and sacrificial

- **Thou know the commandments. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not murder. Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not testify falsely. Thou shall not defraud. Thou shall honor thy father and mother. And having**

answered, he said to him, Teacher, all these things I have observed from my youth.

- And having looked at him, Jesus loved him, and said to him, **One thing thou lack. Go thou, sell as many things as thou have, and give to the poor, and thou will have treasure in heaven. And after taking up the cross, come, follow me. But having become somber at the saying, he went away sorrowing, for he was a man who has many possessions** (Mark 10:19-22).

In answer to his question about entering into life, Jesus quoted some of the ten commandments. The man, having said he had obeyed those, he asked what he lacked yet. In this report Jesus said, **“One thing thou lack.”** However in Matthew’s biography of Jesus, he said, **“If thou want to be perfect”** And in Luke’s biography of Jesus, he said, **“Yet one thing is lacking from thee.”** The main difference in the wording is with the record in Matthew. The difference in the wording in Mark and Luke is insignificant, because they say virtually the same thing.

The explanation is that Jesus no doubt said both of those things; namely wanting to be perfect and lacking one thing. Consider this example: The sign placed on the cross of Jesus is also recorded differently in the four biographies of him. In Matthew the inscription says, **“THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Matthew 27:37). In Mark it says, **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Mark 15:26). In Luke it says, **“THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Luke 23:38). And in John it says, **“JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (John 19:19).

Notice how they all differ in some way. What the complete inscription no doubt said, was **“THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”** Each of the biographers simply omitted part of the inscription. However, all four of them included the words **“The King of the Jews.”** That was the most important part of the inscription. The things each of them omitted were incidental parts, such as the fact he was a Nazarene or that his name was Jesus. The great fact was that he is truly the King of the Jews. Indeed, the Bible says he is **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14).

Those differences in the inscription present a very important lesson about reading the Bible record. Look for the important things recorded, and let not scoffers discourage you about insignificant differences you may find. God tests us in many ways, and such things are just another way he tests our faith in his holy word. Such things enable scoffers to justify to themselves their criticisms, but they also enable believers to search more diligently to find the truth of what it says.

Therefore, regarding what Jesus said to the rich man, I am convinced that each recorder simply reported only part of his words. Thus, all of the words can be revealed by reading all of the reports. Putting the words together, Jesus probably said something like this: **“One thing thou lack, because if thou want to be perfect then”**

The man’s need to forsake his love of money was the one thing he lacked to be perfect, and Jesus knew it. Thus, Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor so he would have treasure in heaven, and come follow him. However, that was too difficult for the man, and so he departed, sorrowing.

Our willingness to “take up the cross” and follow him is another way God tests our souls. We all need to sacrifice our worldly lives to him and his kingdom. Moreover, we all need to examine ourselves to see if there is anything that would be a stumbling block in our obedience and service. Jesus certainly does not want each one of us to sell everything we own, give to the poor, and spend the rest of our lives evangelizing. That was the requirement of the rich man, because it was his greatest stumbling block. And it did prevent him from following Christ.

Rich men enter the kingdom difficultly

- **And Jesus having looked around, he says to his disciples, How difficultly those who have riches will enter into the kingdom of God. And the disciples were astonished at his words. But again having answered, Jesus says to them, Children, how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the hole of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-25).**

Remember, Jesus said that where our treasure is there will our heart be also. The heart of the rich is with their wealth and with the great advantages and privileges it gives them. They have much more to sacrifice in order to enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, their great wealth is a stumbling block to them. And the history of the world proves what Jesus said about them. Very few men of great wealth have ever genuinely committed themselves to Christ. The sacrifices required are too much for such men.

Regarding the hole of a needle, every other translation that I know about says Jesus spoke about the eye of a needle. However, the original Greek says nothing about an eye of a needle. It says the hole of a needle. It may sound more poetic to say the eye of a needle instead of the hole of a needle, but that is just another example of how men change what the word of God says to make it more appealing to men. Most people may be pleased with such changes but God is not pleased. And I seek to please him, not men.

Who then can be saved

- **And they were exceedingly astonished, saying among themselves, Then who can be saved? And having looked at them, Jesus says, With men, impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible (Mark 10:26-27).**

The world thinks rich men are somehow superior. But the word of God does not say they are. For example, Solomon said, **“The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out”** (Proverbs 28:11). Indeed, in the eyes of God rich men are inferior. For example, Jesus said, **“However, woe to you the rich, because ye have received your consolation”** (Luke 6:24).

His disciples probably thought rich men were superior, which would explain why they were exceedingly amazed at what Jesus said about the salvation of rich men. However, Jesus did not explain about rich men. He used the occasion to teach them how salvation is

impossible for all men. No man has or ever will have the power to save his soul. Only God has that power. God can do it because with God all things are possible.

Saving the souls of those who love him, while condemning the souls of those who hate him was probably considered impossible if God was going to always be just. The reason is because all men sin. Therefore, if God is going to condemn those who sin, he must condemn those who love him as well as those who hate him.

That was God's dilemma before he sent his Son into the world. However, by living a sinless life of perfect obedience in this sinful world, Jesus was rewarded with the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. Hence, through Christ, God did what seemed impossible: the salvation of our souls and the condemnation of unrepentant sinners, all with complete justice and impartiality. Jesus also proved that sin was not inevitable. And those things defeated all of his enemies.

Rewards for our sacrifices

- **Peter began to say to him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And having answered, Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no man who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, because of me, and because of the good news, but he will receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands—with persecutions—and in the coming age, eternal life (Mark 10:28-30).**

Not only will the followers of Jesus receive eternal life, but they will receive special blessings here upon the earth. And what Jesus said suggests that those who forsake the most for him and his good news will receive the most compensation. Giving up for his sake our houses, or our lands, or any of our closest kin will result in a hundredfold blessing now and eternal life in the end. Therefore, our compensation for such sacrifices will be much greater than what we give up, a hundred fold greater.

Peter reminded Jesus that his apostles had left all and had followed him. And the record shows how they are a good example of the compensation Jesus mentioned. They were all excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue, thus alienating many if not most of their kinfolk. However, they were embraced and loved by their fellow Christians in the kingdom of God, which number was much larger than their kinfolk.

Nevertheless, that promised reward Jesus gave requires an enormous amount of faith. It takes great faith to leave the persons and things dearest to us. There are not many people who do it. Remember however, not all of us will need to leave those things because of Jesus, and because of the good news. That promise is reserved for those who will need to make that sacrifice.

Notice how Jesus added **“with persecutions”** to those rewards. Those who make such great sacrifices because of him, and because of the good news, will also receive persecutions with those rewards. Indeed, Paul said, **“And also all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (Second Timothy 3:12). In this evil world

receiving blessings from God does not exempt us from being persecuted for following Jesus and his good news of our salvation.

The first and the last

- **But many first will be last, and the last first** (Mark 10:31).

Jesus' comment about the first and the last refers to our status here upon the earth and in heaven. And many of those who are last in this life will be first in the next life. And many of those who are first in this life will be last in the next one. There are many things we determine about our lives. But there are also many things that we cannot determine. For example, I did not choose to be born a man in this great and prosperous land. Nobody chooses where or to whom he is born. There is a modern proverb that says, "There but for the grace of God go I," referring to some suffering soul we might see.

Therefore, God is not going to judge us by our status in the world. He will judge us by what we did with what we had. A good example is the story of a poor widow that is told later in this book. That poor widow cast into the temple treasury a tiny amount of money, but Jesus said of her, **"Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who are casting into the treasury. For they all cast in from that which is abundant to them, but she from her need cast in all, as many things she had, her whole living"** (Mark 12:43-44).

Jesus again prophesies his death and resurrection

- **And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And again having summoned the twelve, he began to tell them the things that were going to happen to him.**
- **Behold, we go up to Jerusalem. And the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scholars. And they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles. And they will mock him, and will scourge, and will spit upon him, and will kill him. And the third day he will rise** (Mark 10:32-34).

Mark first says that Jesus was on the road going up to Jerusalem, and his disciples were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. They were apparently amazed he was going there, and they were afraid because of how dangerous it had become for Jesus to go to Jerusalem. Remember, the rulers of the people wanted to kill him. And Jesus even prophesied to his apostles (but not to the multitude) that he would be arrested and killed there. Yet he always added that he would rise the third day.

Wanting to reign beside him in the kingdom

- **And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come to him, saying, Teacher, we wish that thou would do for us whatever we ask. And he said to them, What**

do ye want me to do for you? And they said to him, Grant to us that we may sit, one at thy right hand, and one at thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said to them, Ye know not what ye are asking. Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? And to be immersed the immersion that I am immersed?

- **And they said to him, We are able. And Jesus said to them, Ye will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and the immersion that I am immersed ye will be immersed. But to sit at my right hand or at my left hand is not mine to give, but for whom it has been prepared (Mark 10:35-40).**

Matthew says that it was the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee who came and made that request. However, Matthew also says that Jesus spoke his answer to them, not to their mother. For example, among his words, Jesus said, **“Ye know not what ye are asking.”** And the pronoun ye is plural. They did not yet realize Jesus would be reigning in heaven, not upon the earth. Nor did they realize the enormous costs that were required to be worthy of receiving such an honor.

The cup that Jesus was to drink, and the immersion that he was to endure, both refer to his trial and crucifixion. Although they did not understand that either, they still proudly claimed they were able to endure whatever he did. However, the record shows they were not able. Nor is any man able to endure the kind of sufferings that Jesus endured. Nevertheless, we must all drink his cup and be immersed his immersion by experiencing some kinds of sufferings in order to remain faithful to him. Our sufferings for him vary among us, but we must all endure whatever they are if we want to live in heaven with him.

The book of Acts tells about our need to suffer many tribulations. For it says about Paul and his companions, **“And having preached the good news to that city, and having made considerable disciples, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:21-22). It is necessary for each of us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations. We must all drink the cup and be immersed the immersion of Jesus in our particular ways. And God determines the particulars about such things for each individual.

The other apostles were indignant

- **And when the ten heard it they began to indignant about James and John. And having summoned them, Jesus says to them, Ye know that those who presume to rule over the Gentiles, lord over them, and their great men have power over them.**
- **But it is not so among you. Instead, whoever may want to become great among you, will be your helper, and whoever of you may want to become first, will be a bondman of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:41-45).**

The other apostles were naturally indignant that those two men wanted to rank themselves over the others. And so Jesus used the occasion to teach a lesson about rule and leadership among them. He used himself as an example of how they could become great among them and be first among them. He was indeed an ideal example, because no other man ever served as a helper serving them as he had. He never did anything selfishly. And when he gave them commands, it was always for their benefit. And so it should also be among the leaders of every congregation of Christ.

Jesus is the head of the church. And there is no other authority in the church higher than the appointed elders of each congregation. However, their authority is limited to practical matters of their congregations, and never to overrule or supersede any doctrine or teaching in the holy scriptures. Nor do they have authority over the personal lives of the members except to teach and encourage obedience to Christ.

And the way the elders are to exercise their authority is to follow the ways of Jesus. For example, they only have the right to admonish, rebuke, and command the withdrawal of fellowship, as forms of punishment for transgressions. And those things can only be done in accordance with the commands and examples of Christ and his apostles, those that are still in effect. Those few supernatural examples of punishment by apostles that we read about were only for those early times before the New Testament was written.

Jesus heals a blind man

- **And they come to Jericho. And as he went out from Jericho, and his disciples and a considerable crowd, Bartimaeus, the blind son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, thou son of David, be merciful to me. And many rebuked him, that he would be quiet, but he cried out much more, Thou son of David, be merciful to me.**
- **And having stood still, Jesus said for him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying to him, Cheer up. Arise, he calls thee. And he, having thrown off his garment, having risen, came to Jesus. And having answered, Jesus says to him, What do thou want I would do to thee? And the blind man said to him, Rabboni, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go thou, thy faith has healed thee. And straightaway he received his sight, and followed him on the way (Mark 10:46-52).**

Matthew gives a very similar story, but says there were two blind men. In Matthew their names were not given, and the record there says nothing about throwing off a garment. It also says they addressed Jesus as Lord, instead of Rabboni. The record in Luke is very similar to this one in Mark, although it says the blind man addressed Jesus as Lord. Otherwise, everything else in the stories are about the same.

Nevertheless, although there are many similarities in the stories, the report in Matthew was probably about different men on a different occasion. For it was very common for blind men to sit by the wayside and beg. And by that time Jesus' reputation as a healer was well known. Hence, desperate men, like those who were blind and begging by the way-

side, were going to cry out for mercy when they heard him passing by. And it was not uncommon for Jesus to ask people what they wanted of him, even when he knew of their infirmity.

Remember what John said about the things Jesus did: **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25). Moreover, the biographers of him did not always report the same events. Hence, be not troubled by different reports that vary about what seems to be the same thing.

Jesus' public entrance on a donkey

- **And when they came near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sends forth two of his disciples, and says to them, Go ye into the village opposite you, and straightaway as ye enter into it, ye will find a colt tied, on which none of men have ever sat. After untying it, bring it. And if any man should say to you, Why are ye doing this? say ye, The Lord has need of it, and straightaway he sends it here.**
- **And they departed, and found the colt tied by the door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those who stood there said to them, What are ye doing, untying the colt? And they said to them just as Jesus commanded, and they allowed them. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it, and he sat upon it** (Mark 11:1-7).

Kings of the world make their grand entrances sitting loftily on noble steeds, not on lowly donkeys, which are used by the common people. Jesus is the King of kings, yet he chose to make his grand entrance into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Remember, Jesus said to the people about himself: **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). Jesus and God his Father have the ultimate power over all things. Yet Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. And if we want to be faithful disciples of him, then we too must be meek and lowly in heart. And we must show it in our lives as he did.

However, that does not mean we should shirk from our battle against sin and wickedness. Remember what David said about Jehovah: **“With the merciful thou will show thyself merciful. With the perfect man thou will show thyself perfect. With the pure thou will show thyself pure. And with the perverse thou will show thyself contrary. For thou will save the afflicted people, but the haughty eyes thou will bring down”** (Psalm 18:25-27)

Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem

- **And many spread their garments upon the road, and others were cutting branches from the fields, and were spreading on the road. And those who went in front, and those who came behind, cried out saying, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of**

our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! (Mark 11:8-10).

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times after he began his ministry. But this was his grand entrance as the son of David, the Messiah. And the multitudes honored him that way, shouting out in praise to him. They even spread things on the road as a sign of honor to him, similar to what we do in modern times with what we call the red carpet treatment. Many of them even spread their garments upon the road for him.

Jesus was called the son of David because he was fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the seed of David. The Messiah was going to be the king that God said would reign over an eternal kingdom. Here is what Jehovah said to David about that king and his kingdom: **“And it shall come to pass, when thy days are fulfilled that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will set up thy seed after thee, who shall be of thy sons. And I will establish his kingdom.**

“He shall build for me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. And I will not take my loving kindness away from him as I took it from him who was before thee [king Saul]. But I will settle him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever” (First Chronicles 17:11-14). Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy, and the house of God that he built is the church.

Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means “save now.” It is used in psalm 118: **“Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah. O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he who comes in the name of Jehovah. We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah”** (Psalm 118:25-26).

Entering into the temple

- **And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple. And when he looked around on all things, the hour now being evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve (Mark 11:11).**

Jesus did not spend the nights in Jerusalem. He lodged in Bethany, which was a village about two miles from Jerusalem. It is interesting that there is no record Jesus ever lodged in Jerusalem after he began his ministry. Matthew mentions Jesus lodging in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany (see Matthew 26:6). And he may also have lodged in that town with Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, because they lived there. (They are mentioned in the biographies by Luke and John.) Bethany is also the place where Jesus ascended into heaven in the sight of his disciples (see Luke 24:50-51).

Cursing a fig tree

- **And on the morrow when they came out from Bethany he was hungry. And having seen a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if perhaps he will find anything on it. And when he came to it he found nothing except leaves, for it was not the time of figs. And having responded, Jesus said to it, No man**

may eat fruit from thee, no more into the age. And his disciples heard it (Mark 11:12-14).

That passage says Jesus was hungry. But why would he go to see if the fig tree had anything on it, when it was not the time of figs? The reason is probably because there are many different varieties of fig trees, and there was the chance that particular tree was of the kind that might have had some fruit on it. Jesus would not have gone if there was no chance of finding figs on it. As the passage says, **“... he came, if perhaps he will find anything on it.”**

However, there were no figs on the tree because it was not the time of figs (for that variety). But then why would Jesus curse the tree? The reason seems to be because there was no indication that fig tree was going to bear fruit. Since the tree was not dormant, it should have either had figs on it or been flowering for them. Instead, the tree had leaves only. Sometimes a fruit tree will fail to ever bear fruit, and that was apparently one of them. Hence, because that particular fig tree had not been bearing fruit, Jesus cursed it.

Luke reports a time when Jesus told a parable about a fig tree that would not bear fruit: **“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the vine workman, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none. Cut it down, why also waste the ground?”**

“And having answered, he says to him, Sir, allow it this year also until I may dig around it and cast manure. Although surely it should bear fruit, and if not, in the coming year thou will cut it down” (Luke 13:6-9).

Jesus used the occasion of the fig tree to teach about the power of prayer. He no doubt ate from many fig trees along the road during his many travels. And since this fig tree was a barren one, he used it as an example of what we can do through prayer. For Mark later tells how his disciples noticed the next day how dead the tree was. That is when Jesus gave his lesson to them about prayer. He never did anything without a good reason, and it is our duty to find the lessons he was making.

Regarding the matter of eating from someone else's fig tree, the law of Moses made that provision for the poor and the sojourners: **“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shall not wholly reap the corners of thy field, nor shall thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shall not glean thy vineyard, nor shall thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard. Thou shall leave them for the poor man and for the sojourner. I am Jehovah your God”** (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Cleansing the temple of robbers

- **And they come to Jerusalem. And having entered into the temple, Jesus began to drive out those who sold and bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold the doves. And he did not permit that any man might carry a container through the temple.**

- **And he taught, saying to them, Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But ye made it a den of robbers (Mark 11:15-17).**

Jesus was physically aggressive to those “robbers” because they were in the temple of God. They obviously had permission to be there from the rulers of the Jews, but they were charging exorbitant prices, making them robbers. They could make excessive charges because many Jews who lived at a far distance or in foreign countries needed to exchange their money so they could make the required animal sacrifices.

Here is the law about using money that way: **“Thou shall surely tithe all the increase of thy seed; that which comes forth from the field year by year. And thou shall eat before Jehovah thy God, in the place which he shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, the tithe of thy grain, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herd and of thy flock, that thou may learn to fear Jehovah thy God always.**

“And if the way is too long for thee, so that thou are not able to carry it, because the place is too far from thee, which Jehovah thy God shall choose to set his name there when Jehovah thy God shall bless thee, then thou shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in thy hand, and shall go to the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose. And thou shall bestow the money for whatever thy soul desires, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever thy soul asks of thee. And thou shall eat there before Jehovah thy God, and thou shall rejoice, thou and thy household. And the Levite who is within thy gates, thou shall not forsake him, for he has no portion nor inheritance with thee” (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

The biography of Jesus by John tells of an earlier time when Jesus had cast out those merchants (see John 2:14-16). Since both of those times occurred at the time of the Passover feast, perhaps those merchants were only there during that annual celebration. Jesus must have cast them out each time he went, but they probably returned after he departed Jerusalem. There are other theories attempting to explain those two reports.

Mark also says that Jesus did not allow any man to carry a container through the temple. Clearly the chief priests and the scholars were more concerned about promoting commerce than they were for reverence in the house of God.

Here is the passage from Isaiah about the temple being a house of prayer for all the nations: **“Also the foreigners who join themselves to Jehovah, to minister to him, and to love the name of Jehovah, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant, even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).**

The chief priests and scholars seek to destroy him

- **And the scholars and the chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him, for they feared him, because all the people were awed at his**

doctrine. And when it became evening he went forth outside of the city
(Mark 11:18-19).

Jesus angered the rulers of the Jews many times. He did not obey their traditions, but exposed them for undermining true obedience to the law. He exposed their hypocrisy, and rebuked them severely because of it. He spoke many parables against them. He violated their extreme legalism of the law, especially about observing the sabbath. And now he was interfering with their profitable commerce.

They were also cowards, because they feared the people, who were awed by his doctrine. Consequently, they would not attempt to attack him in public, even though they were the rulers of the people. That is why Judas betrayed Jesus in the middle of the night outside the city.

At evening Jesus went out of the city because he never slept there. That may have been to keep the city dwellers away from his place of rest. It would have been more difficult for them to follow him out of the city at night to his place of rest.

When the passage says all the people were awed at his doctrine, that does not refer to the entire population, but only to his disciples and those in the temple, the most religious minded of the people.

A lesson about the power of faith

- **And passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree dried out from the roots. And having remembered, Peter says to him, Rabbi, behold, the fig tree that thou cursed has been dried out.**
- **And having answered, Jesus says to them, Have faith in God. For truly I say to you, that whoever may say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and will not doubt in his heart, but will believe that what he says comes to pass, whatever he may say will be for him. Because of this I say to you, all things, as many as ye may ask, praying, believe that ye receive, and it will be for you (Mark 11:20-24).**

In the above passage Jesus taught that lesson about faith after his apostles marveled about how quickly a fig tree he had cursed withered. Jesus told them they would receive whatever they asked in prayer if they believed. Remember, however, whatever we ask in prayer must be according to his will. And that means asking for things that are good and right and just. And the example of the fig tree presented a good lesson for his disciples

And about having things cast into the sea, consider this prophecy of Ezekiel: **“Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken, the gate of the peoples. She has turned around to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste. Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers.**

“I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken it, says the lord

Jehovah. And she shall become a spoil to the nations, and her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword. And they shall know that I am Jehovah” (Ezekiel 26:2-6).

About five centuries before Christ the Babylonians attacked and destroyed the city of Tyre. However, its citizens had escaped to an island not far offshore from the city, and they rebuilt there. About two centuries later Alexander the Macedonian defeated that new city by commanding his army to use the rubble of the old city to make a causeway across to the island. Therefore, the place of the old city was scraped clean and made a bare rock as Jehovah had prophesied to Ezekiel. God can do anything, but he does them in his own time and way.

The record in Matthew says the tree dried out immediately after Jesus cursed it. However, Mark says his disciples did not see the dried out fig tree until the next day. However, there seems to be a simple explanation. The fig tree dried out immediately the day Jesus cursed it, but the effects of that were not visible to his disciples until the next day. That would seem to be what happened, especially if only the trunk, branches, and roots of the tree dried out immediately and not its leaves. The leaves may have fallen afterward. Nevertheless, that is only conjecture, because the Bible gives no explanation.

Be forgiving

- **And whenever ye may stand praying, forgive, if ye have anything against any man, so that also your Father in the heavens will forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father in the heavens forgive your trespasses** (Mark 11:25-26).

We should always be forgiving toward minor offenses, but not toward major ones such as criminal acts. For those are offenses against God, and the designated authorities have the responsibility to avenge such offenses (see Romans 13). Also, forgiveness means not rejecting the guilty person completely. It does not mean the absence of any kind of punishment or required recompense. The Bible is filled with examples where God forgave offenses, but still imposed punishment. See my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ* where I have an entire chapter about forgiveness. The world has greatly perverted the true Bible meaning of forgiveness.

Answering a question with a question

- **And they come again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders come to him. And they say to him, By what authority are thou doing these things? Or who gave thee this authority so that thou may do these things?**
- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, I also will question you one word, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The immersion of John, was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.**

- **And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we should say, From heaven, he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But should we say, From men? (They feared the people, for all held John that he was indeed a prophet.) And having answered, they say to Jesus, We do not know. And having answering, Jesus says to them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things (Mark 11:27-33).**

The chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders were no doubt angry that Jesus had cast out the merchants from the temple. Remember, they were probably receiving payments from the merchants for that privilege. Moreover, Jesus challenged their authority to allow those merchants to be there by casting them out.

When the chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders demanded to know by what authority Jesus did those things, and who gave it to him, he asked them a question. After hearing his question, they knew that whatever answer they gave would have condemned them. Therefore, they refused to answer. That is a good lesson for us. We are not obligated to answer every question someone asks of us, especially if they will not answer our questions. That was not the only time Jesus would not give to those who asked him. We have the freedom to use our discretion about how we respond to people, especially when they challenge us.

The parable of the leased vineyard

- **And he began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard, and set up a hedge, and dug a wine vat, and built a tower, and leased it to farmers, and went on a journey. And at the season he sent forth a bondman to the farmers, so that he might receive by the farmers from the fruit of the vineyard.**
- **And having seized him, they beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another bondman to them. And that man, having stoned, they wounded in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and that man they killed, and many others, beating some, and killing some.**
- **Therefore, still having his one beloved son, he also sent him to them, last, saying, They will be made ashamed by my son. But those farmers said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. And having taken him, they killed him, and cast him outside of the vineyard (Mark 12:1-8).**

In that parable the house-ruler symbolizes God; the vineyard symbolizes the land of Israel; the farmers symbolize the Israelites; the fruits symbolize their productive obedience to him; and the son of the house-ruler is Jesus Christ. Through that parable Jesus prophesied how they would reject and kill him because they wanted to live as they pleased and not how God wanted them to live.

In another sense however, that parable could be generalized to say something about the devil and his disciples. Perhaps what they want is to possess the world as their own. And destroying the Son of God would mean they could keep it. For who else could God give the world to if his Son failed? Therefore, the devil and his disciples did everything they could to cause Jesus to sin so that the kingdom of God in the world would fail. Which would mean the kingdom of the devil would prevail.

The devil and his disciples want us to fail (spiritually) because Jesus lives in us. For Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him”** (Romans 8:9). Indeed, Paul said to the Ephesians, **“... we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

Justice in the end

- **What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the farmers, and will give the vineyard to others** (Mark 12:9).

The record of that response in Matthew reads this way: **“When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers? They say to him, Evil men, he will miserably destroy them, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will render him the fruits in their seasons”** (Matthew 21:40-41). And in Luke it reads this way: **“What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. And having heard it, they said, May it not happen!”** (Luke 20:16).

Both Mark and Luke say that Jesus answered his own question, but Matthew gives the answer of the rulers, both of which answers condemned the farmers. The record in Luke also says that the rulers opposed Jesus' answer.

I would like to offer the following explanation of the differences. Putting the passages together, the story probably went something like this: “What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? They say to him, Evil men, he will miserably destroy them, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus agreed, and said to them, He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. And having heard it and realizing it applied to them, the Jews said, May it not happen!” It was only after the Jews realized the parable was against them that they rejected the judgment of destruction.

Luke merely abbreviated the exchange to present only how the lesson applied to those Jewish rulers and how they refused it. Consequently, he omitted what the rulers said about the farmers in the parable. He omitted it because it was not needed. Their response merely showed how they agreed with the justice of condemning those farmers before they became aware the parable applied to them.

Remember, the Bible is a highly concise and condensed book. Therefore, be not concerned if details are omitted here and there in various passages. God has provided in his holy book what is sufficient to give us the knowledge of him that we need for our faith.

The stone that was rejected

- **And have ye not read this scripture: The stone that those who build rejected, this came to be into the head of the corner. This happened from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes? (Mark 12:10-11).**

Those rulers did not realize the father and the son in that parable referred to God and Christ. And so Jesus tried to make it clear by rebuking them, asking if they never read the scripture about the stone rejected by those who build. That stone symbolizes Jesus Christ, and those who build symbolize the rulers of the Jews.

By means of the parable Jesus was warning those corrupt rulers that God will take vengeance against them and will find others who will serve him in righteousness. And after the parable he reminded them of the psalm about how the stone that was rejected became the headstone: **“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner”** (Psalm 118:22). Jesus told how such things happen from the Lord, which things greatly impress us.

Trying to trap Jesus in his talk

- **And they sought to seize him. And they feared the multitude, for they knew that he spoke the parable against them. And having left him, they went away. And they send some of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to him, so that they might catch him in talk.**
- **And when they came, they say to him, Teacher, we have seen that thou art true, and it is not a care to thee about any man, for thou look not to a personage of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it permitted to give tribute to Caesar or not? Should we give, or should we not give?**
- **But Jesus, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, Why do ye test me? Bring me a denarius, so that I may see it. And they brought it. And he says to them, Whose is this image and inscription? And they said to him, Caesar’s. And having answered, Jesus said to them, Render the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God. And they marveled at him (Mark 12:12-17).**

That event is a classic example of how the devil and his disciples strive to cause righteous men to say something they can use against them. With that question they thought Jesus was trapped. For if he said to pay the tribute money, that would have indicated he supported the Roman occupation of Israel and the requirement to pay them tribute, which was hated by the people. And if he said not to pay it, then he could be charged with teaching rebellion against the Romans. Indeed, the book of Luke says they questioned him that way **“in order to deliver him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor** (Luke 20:20), which man was the representative of Rome.

Jesus easily defeated their crafty design against him, and he used the occasion to teach a lesson about giving the things of God to God. And no doubt the common people, even

though they hated the tribute, rejoiced when they saw the skillful way he turned that crafty question against those hypocrites who asked it. The record says that even those enemies marveled at his answer. Being so awed at his answer they had nothing more they could say, and so they departed.

Sadducees also ask him a question

- **And Sadducees come to him, who say there is no resurrection. And they questioned him, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote to us, If a man's brother dies, and leaves behind a wife, and leaves no child, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed for his brother.**
- **There were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither did he leave seed behind, and the third likewise. And the seven took her, and left no seed. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection when they rise, whose wife will she be of them? For the seven had her as wife (Mark 12:18-23).**

Not much is known about the Sadducees, except they were judged with the Pharisees as men deserving of rebuke. The Sadducees seem to have been a kind of minority political sect of a higher class than the Pharisees. For the book of Acts says the high priest was of the sect of the Sadducees (see Acts 5:17). Also the Bible mentions the Pharisees seven times more often than the Sadducees. The Sadducees apparently believed in God, but not the personal one of the Bible record, because the book of acts says about them, “... Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all” (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees also came to Jesus with what they thought was a question he could not answer. Here is the law about propagating a brother's name: **“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies, and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be, that the firstborn who she bears shall succeed in the name of his brother who is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel”** (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

However, that practice was older than the law of Moses. The first reference in the Bible to that being done was with one of the sons of Judah. Judah was one of the twelve sons of Israel, and he lived centuries before Moses. Here is what the Bible says about it: **“And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah killed him. And Judah said to Onan, Go in to thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to thy brother”** (Genesis 38:6-8).

No marriage in heaven

- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, Are ye not led astray because of this: not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise**

from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as agents in the heavens.

- **But about the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses, how God spoke to him at the bush, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but God of the living. Ye therefore are much misled (Mark 12:24-27).**

Jesus rebuked the Sadducees by saying they were led astray, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. Then he explained the difference of our existence in heaven compared with how it is on the earth. After that he quoted a scripture that implied an afterlife as evidence of the resurrection of the dead.

The passage he quoted was about the first time Jehovah appeared to Moses: **“And the agent of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.**

“And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Do not draw near here. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place on which thou stand is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:2-6).

The fact that Jesus used the scriptures to make inferences justifies our using the scriptures in logical ways to make conclusions that are not specifically stated. Of course, great caution should always be used when interpreting the Bible that way, because it is subject to misuse. Nevertheless, it can be a powerful and very useful way to further our knowledge and understanding.

It should be noted that the Old Testament has no direct teachings about the resurrection of the dead. That is why it was a controversial idea among the Jews. Perhaps God reserved that wonderful knowledge for the time of Christ so that it could be a part of his good news of our salvation.

The two greater commandments

- **And one of the scholars having come, having heard them disputing, knowing that he had answered them well, he questioned him, Which is the first commandment of all?**
- **And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, thou Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shall love the Lord thy God from thy whole heart, and from thy whole soul, and from thy whole mind, and from thy whole strength. This is the first commandment. And this second is similar, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:28-31).**

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. The record there says it was a lawyer who asked that question to Jesus. Apparently therefore, the man must have been a scholar who also practiced law. Mark says that Jesus also quoted the first words that Moses wrote when he gave that law: **“Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah. And thou shall love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”** (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Moses used the Hebrew name for God: Jehovah. However, Jesus called him Lord. The name Jehovah is not found in the New Testament, even when Old Testament passages are quoted, as in above example. The reason is that sometime after the last books of the Old Testament were written, the Jews created a law forbidding anyone to use the name Jehovah. It is claimed the reason was to prevent using it in vain. That was just another of the foolish laws they added to themselves.

Obviously Jesus did not want to make an issue about it. Opposing all of the foolish laws for their nation that the Jews added would have detracted too much from his primary purpose. Nor did his apostles oppose them after his ascension into heaven. Those Jewish laws were only binding for their country, and Jesus had prophesied their destruction during that generation. God used that destruction to eliminate the legality of all those laws, although the stubborn Jews still apply them to themselves. I speak more about God’s name in my translation *The Holy Bible: A Conservative Version*.

Better than offerings and sacrifices

- **And the scholar said to him, Well, teacher. Thou spoke in truth that he is one, and there is no other but he. And to love him from the whole heart, and from the whole understanding, and from the whole soul, and from the whole strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**
- **And when Jesus saw him, that he answered wisely, he said to him, Thou are not far from the kingdom of God. And no man dared to question him any more** (Mark 12:32-34).

When Jesus summarized the law of Moses with those two commandments, it was not a radical idea. That Jewish scholar had reached the same conclusion. And he was obviously pleased that Jesus agreed with him. Jesus also complimented the scholar for his wisdom. And Jesus told him how he was close to the kingdom of God. What Jesus meant by him being close to the kingdom of God was that his ideas about the law were very similar to the doctrines of the good news of Christ. Those doctrines supplanted the legalism of the law with the principles of righteousness.

Jesus interrogates the Pharisees

- **And having responded as he taught in the temple, Jesus said, How do the scholars say that the Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit, The Lord says to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I may place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet. David himself therefore calls**

him Lord, and in what way is he his son? And the great multitude heard him gladly (Mark 12:35-37).

Before David sinned against Uriah, God had promised David to make of him a never ending dynasty. Therefore, the Jews said the Christ (the Messiah, the anointed one) would be a son (a descendant) of David. However, Jesus gave them a riddle about it, which they could not answer. The riddle involved this passage from the Psalms: **“Jehovah says to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool”** (Psalm 110:1). How could David call his son “my Lord?” The answer is that the Christ was a son of David in his flesh, but he was his Lord in his spirit.

Regarding a man calling his son “my lord” or some other title of honor, this perverted generation thinks nothing of sons and daughters being elevated over their parents. Indeed, the entertainment industry promotes the idea that children are worthy of more honor than their parents. They typically portray parents as either inept fools or cruel dictators, while the children are wise and righteous. And they commonly have their parents kneel down and look up to them. Let not those evil men lead you astray from the will of God.

The scholars and Pharisees hated Jesus, but the great multitude in the temple heard him gladly. The greater multitude of the Jews were indifferent about Jesus. For example, they did not care when he was crucified. But those who were in the temple heard him gladly. Being in the temple meant they were the Jews among the common people that were most serious about their faith in God.

Jesus warns of the ways of the scholars

- **And in his teaching he said to them, Look away from the scholars, those who desire to go about in long robes, and salutations in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at the feasts, those who devour widows' houses, and praying long in pretence. These will receive greater condemnation (Mark 12:38-40).**

Most people admire the leading men of the world, and in ancient Israel the scholars were in that class. Remember, literacy was rare in those times, and books were scarce and very expensive, more than the average man could afford even if he could read. The printing press had not been invented, which meant books all had to be reproduced completely by hand. Therefore, copying scrolls and books was a major occupation of the scholars. And since they were so exposed to written material they became very knowledgeable. Hence, they also served as teachers and sources of knowledge. Incidentally, there is good evidence that Christians invented the book form of writing. Before that invention lengthy text was written on scrolls that used either papyrus or parchment, both of which were expensive to make.

Those ancient scholars were proud men who strove to glorify themselves. Moreover, they were vicious hypocrites who made long prayers in pretense, but they devoured widow's houses. Wicked men can more easily devour the houses of poor people because the poor are more vulnerable. And there are many ways men can do such evil things legally. But notice how Jesus said they would receive greater condemnation. He was referring to the

great day of judgment after the world ends. And what he said is more evidence there will be degrees of reward and punishment for the afterlife.

The relativity of giving

- **And having sat down opposite the treasury, Jesus watched how the multitude cast money into the treasury, and many rich men cast in much. And one poor widow having come, she cast in two mites, which are a quadrans.**
- **And having summoned his disciples, he says to them, Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who are casting into the treasury. For they all cast in from that which is abundant to them, but she from her need cast in all, as many things she had, her whole living (Mark 12:41-44).**

Jesus makes clear with this example that God is not impressed by the actual amount of our charity. It is how much we give relative to what we have that is important. In the sight of God a rich man who gives ten thousand dollars has not given as much as a poor man who gives a hundred dollars. It is how much of a sacrifice we are making to do good that is significant in the sight of God.

That poor widow probably did not realize how her sacrifice would honor her, because what she gave was so little. Yet Jesus was so impressed by what she did that he told his disciples about her. And now the whole world can learn about what she did, because the story of her sacrifice is included in the Bible. She was not the only woman that Jesus praised because of a sacrifice made to do a good work. Think not that your sacrifices are unnoticed by God, even though they may be small in the eyes of the world.

Questions about the end

- **And as he went forth out of the temple, one of his disciples says to him, Teacher, see what kind of stones and what kind of buildings. And Jesus having answered, he said to him, See thou these great buildings? There will be left, no, not a stone upon a stone, that will, no, not be brought down.**
- **And as he sat upon the mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew questioned him privately, Tell us, when will these things be? And what is the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled? (Mark 13:1-4).**

When Jesus prophesied to his disciples the complete destruction of the temple they later questioned him for more details. Mark only records their question about the destruction of the temple. However, according to the record in Matthew, they also asked him about the end of the world: **“Tell us, when will these things be? And what is the sign of thy coming, and of the termination of the age?”** (Matthew 24:1-3). Remember, each biographer wrote differently, adding and omitted various things more or less, just as all witnesses of complex events do.

Be not led astray by false Christs

- **And having answered them, Jesus began to say to them, Watch that not any man lead you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, I am, and they will lead many astray (Mark 13:5-6).**

After almost two thousand years it is rare now for some man to claim he is the Christ. Nevertheless, I have seen many men who proclaimed they were saviors. And they gathered a large following of people who believed in them. Yet eventually such men always proved to be false, and their followers suffered because of it. I have seen the tragic consequences of that happening with many of them. Yet there are still some who have not been exposed. It is a continual overlapping process of such men rising and then falling. While some are falling, others are rising. Beware of them all.

The travails of the world

- **And when ye may hear of wars and rumors of wars, be not alarmed, for it must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These things are the beginnings of travails (Mark 13:7-8).**

After that warning Jesus told them to expect many tribulations in the world before the end happens—wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes. Those things happen in every generation, and they will continue till the end of the world. When Jesus said all those things were the beginning of travail, he was simply saying that when wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes happen to them, those things were just the beginning of such travails. For they will happen in every generation until the end of the world.

What to say when oppressed

- **But watch ye yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and ye will be beaten in synagogues. And ye will be stood before rulers and kings because of me, for a testimony to them. And the good news must first be preached to all the nations.**
- **But when they lead you, delivering you up, be not anxious before what ye might speak, nor meditate. But whatever may be given you in that hour, speak ye this, for ye are not who speak, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11).**

Jesus warned them about the severe persecutions they would suffer by the rulers. He said they would even stand before kings to testify about him. However, he also indicated to them that his good news of salvation would spread throughout the world.

Then he told them how they were to respond when they were delivered up to the authorities. They were not to be anxious about what they would say, because the Holy Spirit of God would guide them. Indeed, their responses to the authorities would be divinely inspired. What they say would not be their words, but those of the Holy Spirit.

Knowing those things about the Holy Spirit gave his apostles great confidence, which strengthened the power of their testimony. Here is an example of that confidence. When Peter and John were later arrested for preaching the good news of Christ, the record says, **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they are illiterate and uneducated men, they marveled. And they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13).

Warnings about betrayal

- **And brother will betray brother to death, and a father a child. And children will rise up against parents, and will condemn them to death. And ye will be hated by all men because of my name, but he who endures to the end, this man will be saved** (Mark 13:12-13).

Jesus also warned his disciples about the severe persecutions they would suffer, even from their nearest kin. What he prophesied happened during those ancient times, and it is happening in the Arab nations even now. Any Arab Muslim who becomes a disciple of Christ is hated and rejected by his family, and is condemned to die according to Muslim doctrine.

After those warnings of persecution and tribulation, Jesus gave them words of encouragement. He said the man who endures is he who will be saved. Remember what the book of Acts says that Paul and his co-workmen taught the disciples about tribulations. They said **“it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). Tribulations test our souls, and enable us to show our worthiness for becoming sons of God for eternity.

When Jerusalem will be destroyed

- **But when ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let him who reads understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, and let the man on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter in to take anything out of his house, and let the man who is in the field not turn back for the things behind, to take his cloak. But woe to those who have in the womb, and to those who suckle in those days.**
- **And pray ye that your flight may not be in winter. For those days will be tribulation, such as has not happened from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and no, will not happen. And unless the Lord cut short the days, no flesh would have been saved, but because of the chosen, whom he chose, he cut short the days** (Mark 13:14-20).

Jesus here prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The abomination of desolation is part of a prophecy told to Daniel by an agent from heaven. Here is that part: **“And forces shall stand on his part, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate”** (Daniel 11:31).

The abomination that makes desolate, the abomination of desolation refers to the Roman army. They were an abomination that came to Israel and brought complete desolation to Jerusalem and the temple. They broke into the temple itself, even into the holy place. They were therefore, the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place.

Jesus warned his disciples that as soon as they saw that happening to make great haste and immediately flee from Jerusalem and Judea to escape the great tribulations the Roman army would bring there. Indeed, he said the tribulation of those days would be the most severe the world had ever seen or ever will see. And if God had not cut the time short every soul in Judea would have perished. That was how much wrath God had unleashed against that sinful generation of Jews who forsook his only begotten Son and murdered him. But because of the few who were faithful, God shortened the days of that destruction.

When those things happened the Roman army was apparently so full of fury and had so much power, that they wanted nothing but death and a completely scorched earth for the land of Israel. The Jews had always been a thorn in the side of the Romans because the Jews had such a fierce attitude of superiority, contempt for Gentiles, and rebellious independence.

Therefore, Jesus gave that strict warning for his disciples to flee regardless of what they left behind. And they were to pray that circumstances (like winter, or the sabbath day, or a woman being pregnant or caring for a young infant) would not make their flight more difficult. Regarding the sabbath, remember, the Jews had created a law to limit how much travel could be done on the sabbath. And if they violated that law they would not only face the wrath of the Romans but also the wrath of the Jews. For the Jews fiercely resisted the Romans, and they resented all who would not stay and fight.

Moreover, the fanatical Jews kept everyone in the city and would not any to escape. They kept everyone there to help fight the Roman army. That was why Jesus' disciples needed to escape out of the city as quickly as possible. For the people of the city suffered enormously, first by famine cause by the siege, and then by the vicious Roman army when they conquered it.

Beware of false Christs

- **And then if any man should say to you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Lo, there, do not believe. For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will give signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen. But watch ye. Behold, I have foretold all to you (Mark 13:21-23).**

The Jews were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Messiah to save them. They expected he would be a great warrior-king who would defeat all their enemies. Therefore, Jesus warned about the many false Christs and false prophets that would arise. And he warned they would give great signs and wonders to lead people astray.

Those signs and wonders would be so impressive that the faith of even his loyal disciples would be challenged. The chosen of God are those who have made their souls such that

they are worthy of his salvation. They are not specific people predestined for salvation independent of their will. For remember, God is completely impartial.

Nevertheless, whatever great signs and wonders were done by such false Christs and false prophets they were not miracles. Instead, they were extremely effective illusions, so effective that people were convinced of their reality. Such kinds of illusions are commonly produced by entertainers called conjurers, magicians, and illusionists. However, those false Christs and false prophets would deceive the people into thinking they were true miracles.

Dear reader, never be deceived that way. You can marvel about how spectacular such things may appear. But never be deceived into believing them. For they can never stand the test of careful scrutiny by those who are skilled in exposing them. Remember how Jesus forewarned against such deceivers.

How the end will appear

- **But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars of the sky will be falling, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken** (Mark 13:24-25).

What Jesus meant by “**in those days, after that tribulation,**” was simply the days of the future. In other words, the world would end sometime in the future after that destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

In Matthew Jesus said the world would end “**straightaway after the tribulation of those days**” (Matthew 24:29). In other words, the world will end immediately after whatever specific tribulations may be occurring at the time of the end. For the travails of this world will continue until the end. In those two passages, Jesus was speaking about two different tribulations: those for the Jews during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and those for mankind happening immediately before the end of the world.

Jesus said the end of the world will begin with the onset of darkness throughout the universe. And apparently the stars of the sky will fall toward each other in a shrinking space. Scientists tell us that most of the world, including the stars of the heavens are empty space. In fact, according to the Big Bang theory, the entire world began smaller than an atomic particle. And it could shrink that small again.

Indeed, the modern theory of the Big Crunch predicts such a thing will happen. That theory claims the Big Bang will be reversed into a Big Crunch. Thus, according to that theory, all the mighty celestial bodies will be removed or shaken from their positions, and will fall together into an ever shrinking space, smaller than an atomic particle. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

I mention those things to explain scientifically how stars can literally fall from the sky. Jesus did not say it would happen exactly like the Big Crunch theory, but he did say the stars would fall from the sky. And the only way that could happen is if they began shrinking and falling toward the earth.

Nevertheless, regardless of how it happens, we as Christians believe the prophecy of Jesus will be fulfilled. For he is the Son of God who created everything. Consider what the apostle John said about him: “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,**

and the Word was God. This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be” (John 1:1-3).

How his return will appear

- **And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with much power and glory. And then he will send forth his agents, and will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the outermost part of the earth as far as the outermost part of heaven (Mark 13:26-27).**

Some kind of awesome sign of the Son of man, Jesus Christ, is going to appear in the sky. And it will somehow appear in a way that all the peoples of the world will see it. And when they see him coming in the sky with power and much glory, it will cause them great alarm and fear. And the first thing Jesus is going to do is send forth his agents to gather his chosen from throughout the universe, **“from the outermost part of the earth as far as the outermost part of heaven.”**

Here is how the apostle Paul describes that great time: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God.**

“And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (First Thessalonians 4:15-18).

Those who proclaim that Jesus is coming back to reign upon the earth are wrong. The Bible does not support that kind of thinking. When Jesus returns again he will be in the clouds of the sky, and we will be gathered up with him in the air. After which we will live with him in heaven for eternity. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Recognizing the sign

- **But learn a parable from the fig tree. When its branch now becomes tender, and sprouts the leaves, ye know that summer is near. So ye also, when ye may see these things happening, know ye that it is near, at the doors. Truly I say to you, that this generation will, no, not pass away, until all these things happen. The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away (Mark 13:28-31).**

Jesus then warned his disciples with a parable to look for the signs that were going to come upon that generation, meaning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And he told them that would happen during the time of their generation, which it did.

When he said **“these things happening”** he was referring to what he said about the abomination of desolation, the Roman army. And he reinforced the certainty of his prophecy by saying the world itself would pass away, but not his words.

Only God knows when

- **But about that day or that hour no man knows, not even the agents in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father (Mark 13:32).**

During every generation men arise and claim they know when the end will be. They have always been proven wrong, and they always will be. For Jesus said that nobody knows, not even himself. If God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ does not know, how can any man say that he does? Shun such false prophets and expose them. Be not taken in by their clever talk and their persuasiveness. They will always be wrong.

Be prepared for the end

- **Watch ye! Be alert and pray, for ye know not when the time is, like a man abroad, having left his house, and having given authority to his bondmen, and to each man his work, and commanded the doorkeeper that he should watch.**
- **Watch therefore, for ye know not when the lord of the house comes, at evening, or at midnight, or at cock crowing, or in the morning, lest having come suddenly, he may find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all, watch! (Mark 13:33-37).**

That is yet another parable Jesus gave to warn us about continuing to do our duty before God so that we can be prepared for whenever he comes for us. Many times Jesus commanded his disciples to watch. And that applies to us as well, because he also said, **“And what I say to you I say to all, watch!”**

We all need to watch and be prepared, not specifically for the end of the world, but for the end of *our* world. For every one of us is going to die sometime, and we rarely know when it will happen. And when it does happen that is the end of the world for us. And it could happen most any time. For who has never been surprised at the death of someone. Therefore, hearken to the words of Jesus and watch, meaning always be prepared for him.

Plotting to take Jesus by trickery

- **Now after two days was the Passover and the unleavened bread. And the chief priests and the scholars sought how, having take him with trickery, they might kill him, but they said, Not during the feast, lest there will be an uproar of the people (Mark 14:1-2).**

The feast of unleavened bread began with Passover and lasted seven days. Jesus was betrayed the night of the Passover meal.

Jesus had earlier told those chief priests and scholars they were sons of the devil, and they proved it by their actions. They were not interested in truth and justice. They condemned Jesus because they hated both him and what he taught. As sons of the devil they were serving the wishes of the devil, although unknowingly.

Moreover, they were not only wicked men, but they were also cowards. They feared the people. Wicked rulers are often restrained by their fear of the population. Wicked rulers are also often very suspicious, always having a background of fear in their minds. And that can make them very ruthless to individuals.

Precious ointment for Jesus

- **And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat relaxing, a woman came having an alabaster cruse of ointment of pure spikenard, very valuable. And having broken the alabaster cruse, she poured it on his head.**
- **And some were indignant within themselves, saying, Why has this waste of the ointment happened? For this could have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and given to the poor. And they grumbled at her.**
- **But Jesus said, Leave her be. Why do ye cause troubles for her? She performed a good work on me. For ye always have the poor with you, and whenever ye may desire ye can do them well, but ye do not always have me. She applied what she had to anoint my body. She did it beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever this good news may be preached in the whole world, also what she did will be told for a memorial of her (Mark 14:3-9).**

Remember, Bethany was a village about two miles from Jerusalem, which means it took less than an hour to go from there to Jerusalem. The record of this occasion is the only time Simon the leper is mentioned in the Bible. Jesus had probably healed him of his leprosy at some time, but there is no record of it. Simon must have had a very severe case of leprosy for him to still be called Simon the leper.

Regarding alabaster, according to a dictionary I have, it is “a translucent, whitish, fine-grained variety of gypsum, used for statues, vases, etc.” What the woman brought was no doubt a high quality cruse that contained the precious ointment.

Regarding the reason she used in on Jesus, why should the Son of God himself not have the best ointment placed on him, especially when he was soon going to endure great suffering for our sakes? There is a time and use for all things, a time to conserve for the poor and a time to expend for an extraordinary person and event. The woman was not named, nor is anything else told about her. Nevertheless, she obviously had great love for Jesus to make that sacrifice for him.

That story also shows the compassion Jesus has for even the most humble and lowly soul. He came to the woman’s defense because she provided that precious ointment for him at great expense to her. It was an unselfish sacrifice for a noble cause. And her values were

better than those of her accusers. Therefore, Jesus not only defended her, but he honored her greatly with his prophecy about how she would be remembered.

And in heaven he will defend and honor all the humble and lowly of the world who sacrifice for him, and value him above all else. And remember, whatever kindness we show to anyone who belongs to him is the same as showing kindness to him.

Judas agrees to betray Jesus

- **And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went away to the chief priests, so that he might betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him silver. And he sought how he might betray him conveniently (Mark 14:10-11).**

John's biography of Jesus says that Judas was the man who first accused the woman of wasting the ointment (see John 12:4-5). And since the text says that Judas then went to the chief priests to offer to betray Jesus, perhaps Judas felt humiliated by the rebuke Jesus made of his accusation. And Judas' resentment may have provoked him to make the offer to betray him. However, the Bible says nothing about that; it is only a conjecture based upon the timing.

According to the book of Matthew the chief priests gave Judas silver in advance, which was probably to encourage him not to change his mind about betraying Jesus. Nevertheless, from that time Judas sought how he might betray him conveniently. That means away from the multitudes that supported him.

Preparing for Passover

- **And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, his disciples say to him, Where do thou want, after going, we should prepare that thou may eat the Passover? And he sends forth two of his disciples, and says to them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him.**
- **And wherever he may enter, say ye to the house-ruler, The teacher says, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? And he himself will show you a large upper room spread out ready. Prepare ye for us there. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found just as he had said to them. And they prepared the Passover (Mark 14:12-16).**

The Passover feast required using unleavened bread and an unblemished male lamb for the feast. Remember, the Passover feast was to celebrate the salvation of their firstborn sons when God slew all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians the night before the sons of Israel were given their freedom and departed from Egypt.

Here is the law for the original Passover feast: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye to all the congregation of Israel,**

saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

“And if the household be too little for a lamb, then he and his neighbor next to his house shall take one according to the number of the souls, according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb.

“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. Ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats. And ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening.

“And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel upon the houses in which they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread, with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat of it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire, its head with its legs and with the inwards of it. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning, but that which remains of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

“And thus ye shall eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And ye shall eat it in haste. It is Jehovah's Passover.

“For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am Jehovah. And the blood shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where ye are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

“And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to Jehovah; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever” (Exodus 12:1-14). The Israelites departed Egypt the very next morning after the Passover. Indeed, the Egyptians urged them to leave quickly because they were afraid they were all going to die.

Originally the Passover feast was separate from the feast of unleavened bread. However, it was not long before they joined the two together, and that had Moses' approval. I discuss those things much more in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Jesus says one of them would betray him

- And having become evening he comes with the twelve. And as they were relaxing and eating, Jesus said, Truly I say to you, that one of you eating with me will betray me. They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one by one, Not I? and another, Not I?
- And having answered, he said to them, It is one of the twelve dipping with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goes as it is written about him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It was good for him if that man was not born (Mark 14:17-21).

Several times Jesus told his apostles that he would be betrayed. This was the first time he said one of them would be the betrayer. Since each of them asked him if he would be the

one, it is obvious the others could not believe that one of them would betray him deliberately. They no doubt thought the betrayal would be accidental. And the record says they were sorrowful. Indeed, Matthew says they were exceedingly sorrowful (see Matthew 17:23).

His comment about his betrayer dipping his hand with him in the dish, is from the same prophecy about him being betrayed: **“Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”** (Psalm 41:9). All of the apostles were dipping their hands in the dish with him, and so that comment did not identify the guilty man. The book of John tells how Jesus first revealed who the man was to the apostles John and Peter.

Dipping the hand in the dish probably means using pieces of the bread and/or of the lamb to collect whatever porridge or other soft food to eat. And apparently they had one large dish into which they all dipped. If there had been several small dishes, they could have narrowed down who would betray Jesus. For he said it was he who dipped in the dish with him. But with one large dish that would not identify the man. Nevertheless, when it became Judas’ turn to ask if he was the man, Jesus said he was the one (see Matthew 26:25).

Jesus said it was necessary for him to go as it was written about him, which refers to his betrayal and crucifixion. Nevertheless, he still uttered a curse against his betrayer, saying, **“... woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for him if that man had not been born.”** Remember, a woe is a curse. Yet Judas was not deterred from betraying him. Judas may not have taken the curse seriously, because he had no faith in him, no more than the scholars and Pharisees that Jesus cursed.

Instituting the Lord’s supper

- **And as they were eating, Jesus having taken bread, having blessed, he broke in pieces, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And after taking the cup, having expressed thanks, he gave to them, and they all drank from it. And he said to them, This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many.**
- **Truly I say to you, that I will no more drink of the fruit of the grapevine, until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God** (Mark 14:22-25).

Those things happened during the last supper. And it describes how Jesus established that simple ceremony as a memorial of him and his great sacrifice for our salvation. For the record about it in Luke’s biography of him also contains these words: **“Do ye this in my memory”** (Luke 22:19). His biography by Matthew also describes how Jesus instituted that ceremony. Only John’s biography of him omits it.

The apostle Paul also wrote about when Jesus established that simple ceremony, when he said, **“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and said, Take ye, eat, this is my body broken for you. This do ye in my memory. Likewise also the cup after the supper, saying, This cup is the new cove-**

nant in my blood. This do, as often as ye drink it, in my memory. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (First Corinthians 11:23-26). Notice how Paul also quoted Jesus saying they were to do it in his memory.

All four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, reported how Jesus said the cup of it was his blood of the new covenant. God made several covenants with men in the past. His covenant with the sons of Israel involving the law of Moses is traditionally called the old covenant. The good news of Christ is the new covenant, which says that God will forgive our sins and adopt us to be his sons for eternity in heaven, if we will believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

And that good news is the last covenant God made with man, because it is an eternal covenant. As the author of Hebrews said, **"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood of an eternal covenant—our Lord Jesus—may he make you fully qualified in every good work in order to do his will, doing in you what is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly"** (Hebrews 13:20-21).

It is also a covenant in blood, the blood of the sinless Son of God. The fruit of the grapevine that we drink during the Lord's supper symbolizes his blood. Both the bread and the fruit of the grapevine symbolize his great sacrifice for us, the sacrifice of his very life upon the cruel cross. And we partake of them to remember that sacrifice.

Jesus did not command when or how often to observe that ceremony. He simply said that as often as we did it we proclaimed his death, sacrificing his life that way for us. Paul went on to say much more about that ceremony. He wrote to those brothers in Corinth in an attempt to correct how they had misapplied and abused it.

Yet there is still much controversy about performing that ceremony. Men dispute about when and how often to partake of it; some dispute about whether there should only be one cup and one loaf; some dispute about whether to use wine or just grape juice because the Bible does not say specifically whether the fruit of the grapevine was fermented or not. That drink was their most common beverage, and is colored red like blood.

Men also dispute about whether they should only use unleavened bread, which is what they used at the last supper. The last supper was held in obedience to the command for the annual Passover feast. And only unleavened bread was allowed for that feast.

Jesus never gave detailed instructions about that simple ceremony because his good news is a law of liberty. As James said, **"So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty"** (James 2:12). Therefore, it is a mistake to dispute about such things. Paul wrote much to discourage Christians from disputing about matters of opinion (see Romans 14). What is important is that it is done frequently enough to keep his great sacrifice in our memory, and that it should be done with dignity and solemnity. All that is required is bread and fruit of the grapevine. All else is under the law of liberty.

In Matthew's biography of Jesus he said that Jesus expressed thanks after taking bread. However, Mark says that Jesus blessed after taking bread. Apparently therefore, expressing thanks to God for the bread is the same as blessing it. It is the same as blessing, because once the bread is used as part of this memorial it becomes holy and is therefore

blessed. It is blessed, but not according to the incredibly fantastic and ridiculous Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. It is astonishing that anyone believes in that doctrine.

Jesus says they will scatter

- **And when they sang a hymn, they went out onto the mount of Olives. And Jesus says to them, All ye will be caused to stumble by me this night, because it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee (Mark 14:26-28).**

Jesus warned them they would all be caused to stumble by him that night, and he quoted the prophecy about it, which is in this passage of the Old Testament: **“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my companion, says Jehovah of hosts. Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered”** (Zechariah 13:7).

His apostles would all be scattered because Jesus their shepherd would be smitten by the rulers of the Jews. Although Jesus warned them many times it would happen, they would still be confused and alarmed when it did happen, and that would cause them to scatter, as Jesus warned them they would.

Nevertheless, Jesus assured them he would be raised up and would go before them into Galilee. Whenever Jesus warned of troubles to come, he always gave them words of encouragement.

Peter disputes with Jesus

- **But Peter said to him, Even if all will be caused to stumble, yet not I. And Jesus says to him, Truly I say to thee, that thou today, in this night, before a cock sounds twice, will deny me thrice. But he spoke more extreme, If I must die with thee, I will, no, not deny thee. And they all spoke the same way also (Mark 14:29-31).**

Peter was so self-confident of his loyalty to Jesus that he disputed with him about stumbling. Peter never turned against Jesus, but he let his love and zeal for him sometimes cause him to dispute with what Jesus said. Remember how Peter disputed with him when Jesus said he would suffer and be killed by the rulers of the Jews. Peter no doubt thought that he was showing his support for Jesus, but he was actually failing to support him. He was failing because he contradicted what Jesus said. And a lesson for us is to never dispute with anything taught in the word of God, if we want to be truly loyal to him.

Since Peter disputed with Jesus about stumbling, God allowed Peter to be tempted to deny him, which Peter did that very night. None of the other apostles were tempted that way.

Regarding Peter's denial, according to Matthew, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that in this night, before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice”** (Matthew 26:34). According to the passage here in Mark, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that thou today, in this night, before a cock sounds twice, will deny me thrice”** (Mark 14:30). According to Luke, Jesus said, **“I say to thee, Peter, a cock will, no, not sound today, before thou**

will thrice deny that thou know me” (Luke 22:34). And according to John, Jesus said, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, A cock will, no, not sound, until thou will deny me thrice”** (John 13:38).

All four biographers report Jesus saying (1) Peter would deny him, (2) he would deny him before a cock sounded, and (3) he would deny him three times that night. However, Mark reported Jesus saying that Peter would deny him thrice before a cock sounded twice. And in his testimony he does mention a cock sounding and then sounding a second time, and he told how Peter denied Jesus once before a cock sounded the first time.

The difference in Mark’s report is difficult to explain. Remember, it is common in their reports about Jesus for his biographers to leave out some things that others include. Therefore, putting all four reports about Peter’s denial together, Perhaps Jesus said something like this: **“Truly I say to thee Peter, a cock will no, not sound today, in this night, before thou will deny that thou know me, even denying me thrice before a cock sounds twice.”**

Apparently Matthew, Luke, and John only wanted to report the important things about what Jesus said about Peter’s denial. Namely, that (1) he would deny Jesus, (2) he would deny him before a cock sounded, and (3) he would deny him three times that night. And all four biographers reported those things happening. Whether Peter denied Jesus thrice before a cock sounded the first time or the second time is insignificant.

Nevertheless, whatever is the explanation, any man who denies the Bible record being inspired by God simply because of such differences is like those of the parable symbolized by the rocky ground. About whom Jesus said, **“And these in like manner are those being sown upon the rocky places, who, whenever they may hear the word, straight-away receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but are temporary. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution develops because of the word, straight-away they are caused to stumble”** (Mark 4:16-17).

Incidentally, other versions speak of the cock crowing. However, the Greek word does not say crowing. There is another Greek word for that, which is given in this passage: **“Watch therefore, for ye know not when the lord of the house comes, at evening, or at midnight, or at cock crowing, or in the morning, lest having come suddenly, he may find you sleeping”** (Mark 13:36).

Jesus prays for avoidance

- **And they come to a place the name of which was Gethsemane. And he says to his disciples, Sit ye here until I pray. And he takes Peter and James and John with him, and began to be greatly disturbed, and very distressed. And he says to them, My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death. Remain ye here, and watch.**
- **And having gone forward a little, he fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me, but not what I want, but what thou want** (Mark 14:32-36).

Jesus felt a powerful dread of that terrible ordeal because it caused him to suffer more than any other man ever had or ever will. And having to endure that ordeal voluntarily was perhaps the most difficult part. Here is a passage from Luke that describes more of the dread he had just before that terrible ordeal: **“And having become in agony he prayed more intensely, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground”** (Luke 22:44).

The constant abuse he was given, the great fatigue he had to endure, and the extreme pain of being flogged and being nailed and hung on the cross were all insignificant compared with the requirement that he who is the eternal King of kings, Lord of lords, and the very author of life had to allow himself to be humiliated and killed.

Moreover, the man of perfect justice who never sinned had to allow the injustice against him of being put on public display and executed as a criminal. As the author of Hebrews said, Jesus **“endured a cross, having despised the shame ...”** (Hebrews 12:2), which no doubt included being publicly displayed as completely naked.

No degree of suffering by anybody can come close to being as severe as his was—it was truly unique. That was why he was in such agony before it happened. That was why he prayed three separate times, saying, **“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou”** (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Yet he endured it all willingly so that he could become our Redeemer to save our souls, and that was because he loves the Father and he loves us. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

Why Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John is not told, because the eleven apostles all came to Gethsemane with him. Remember however, those three apostles were chosen by him to see his transfiguration on the mountain (see Matthew 17:1-2). And Paul later said those three men they were reputed to be pillars (see Galatians 2:9).

His disciples sleep

- **And he comes and finds them sleeping. And he says to Peter, Simon, Do thou sleep? Could thou not watch one hour? Watch ye and pray that ye may not enter into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak** (Mark 14:37-38).

The disciples that Jesus saw sleeping were probably Peter, James, and John, because he took them with him and commanded them to watch while he went to pray. And he chided them, because falling asleep on watch is a serious offense. Nevertheless, he was gentle with them because that was an extraordinary time. Those men were very confused and troubled about what Jesus said was going to happen. And in the quietness and darkness of the night they had difficulty keeping themselves awake. As Jesus said about them, **“Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** They wanted to stay awake but their sleepiness overcame them. Who has never fallen asleep against his will?

What was the temptation that Jesus warned them against? He was probably speaking of the temptation they would face to forsake him altogether, not just that night. For after

Jesus was arrested, the apostles hid themselves for several days to avoid similar treatment by the Jews.

It would have been easier for them to just give up and abandon their faith in Jesus. But they did not do it. They kept together in hiding, not knowing what else to do. For they still did not expect him to rise from the dead and come back to them. They probably thought the rising from the dead he spoke about was his Spirit being taken to heaven.

Nevertheless, his lesson about watching and praying to keep from entering into temptation is applicable to us all. We should never relax our spiritual guard against the threats of temptation. And prayer helps us. We should never lose our faith in the power of prayer.

Jesus again prays for avoidance

- **And again having departed, he prayed, having said the same statement. And having returned, he found them again sleeping, for their eyes were weighed down, and they knew not what they should reply to him. And he comes the third time, and says to them, Sleep the remaining, and take your rest (Mark 14:39-41).**

There is nothing wrong with continuing to pray to God for the same thing, as long as we accept his decision even when it is against what we request. Jesus may have uttered more words in his prayer than are quoted here, because he was gone long enough for his disciples to have gone back to sleep. Even though they no doubt tried to keep awake after he chided them.

Notice how Jesus said to his Father, “... **if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me, except I drink it, may thy will happen.**” It was God’s will that Jesus suffer that way because our salvation was not possible any other way. That was the only way that Jesus could redeem us from being condemned with the devil and the demons.

God can do all things with what he created. But our eternal spirits were not created; we are his offspring, having come from his own Spirit (inherited from Adam). Therefore, the obedient suffering of Jesus was the only way for our salvation. I explain those things much more in my book’s *The Law of God before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

His betrayer comes

- **It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going. Behold, he who betrays me has come near. And straightaway, while he still spoke, Judas, being one of the twelve, comes, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs from the chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders (Mark 14:41-43).**

How long it was between the time Jesus told his disciples to sleep what remains and take rest, and the time that Judas came is not told. Indeed, nothing is said about the times of any of those events, except they happened the night of the Passover feast, which that year was

on a Thursday. Remember, their days began and ended at 6 AM, not midnight the way our days begin and end. He was arrested Thursday night, and crucified Friday.

The chief priests, and the scholars, and the elders of the people sent with Judas a great multitude armed with deadly weapons to arrest Jesus. The exact number of them is not given, but it must have been many times more than Jesus and his eleven apostles. Those rulers must have thought that Jesus and his apostles would resist and fight. And they would have fought if Jesus wanted them. Hence, the rulers sent a great multitude of armed men to be sure Jesus was arrested.

Jesus is arrested

- **Now he who betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, Whomever I may kiss is he. Seize him, and lead away securely. And when he came, straightaway having approached him, he says, Rabbi, Rabbi, and kissed him much. And they threw their hands on him, and seized him** (Mark 14:44-46).

What that passage reveals is amazing. Judas not only betrayed Jesus by revealing where he could be arrested away from the people, and then leading his enemies to that place, but he even identified Jesus by kissing him. The Greek word for kiss in that passage means kissing much and not just once. Therefore, that is how I translated it. And that reveals how hypocritical Judas was.

One of the apostles uses a sword

- **And a certain one of those who stood by, having drawn his sword, struck the bondman of the high priest, and cut off his ear** (Mark 14:47).

Jesus' biography by Luke tells why the apostles had a sword with them (see Luke 22:36-38). And his biography by John says that Peter is the one who struck the bondman of the high priest (see John 18:10). Luke also tells how Jesus restored the man's ear (see Luke 22:51).

Jesus would not allow his apostles to defend him by force. Therefore, he commanded them against it. During his trial Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus said to him, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here"** (John 18:36). That is why the church does not use carnal force in its war against evil. For ours is a spiritual war, a war for the hearts and souls of men, not their bodies only. And our weapon is the **"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (Ephesians 6:17). It is the duty of rulers of governments to combat evil with carnal force (see Romans 13:1-6).

Jesus shames those who arrest him

- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, Have ye come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to arrest me? I was daily near you, teaching**

in the temple, and ye did not seize me—but that the scriptures might be fulfilled. And having forsook him, they all fled (Mark 14:48-50).

It is obvious that none of those men who were sent from the chief priests and the elders of the Jews believed in him. Otherwise they would not have done it. Jesus shamed those men; not for arresting him, but for the way they came. He made it clear to them that they came in a cowardly way, justifying themselves by acting like he was a criminal. And their rulers were cowards, because they feared to take him publicly.

When Jesus said, “... **but that the scriptures might be fulfilled**,” he was referring to his betrayal and death. One reason that Jesus submitted himself to that ordeal was that the scriptures might be fulfilled. For Jesus had said, “... **the scripture cannot be broken** ...” (John 10:35). That means every part of the word of God is true, including the fulfillment of every prophecy.

As Jesus had warned his disciples, they all forsook him and fled. (Although they did not abandon their faith in him.) I have heard many men condemn those apostles for that. However, I have absolutely no doubt that every man who ever lived as they had in those circumstances would have done exactly the same thing. Those men forsook him that way in fulfillment of the prophecy, and I have no doubt God did not count that sin against them. Therefore, how can any man be so self-righteous as to stand aloof and condemn them?

A young man flees naked

- **And a certain one young man followed with him, having been wrapped naked in a linen cloth. And the young men seized him, but having left behind the linen cloth, he fled from them naked** (Mark 14:51-52).

There is much mystery about that story. From whence came that young man is not told. Nor does it say why he followed with Jesus. It simply says he followed with him. And there is nothing to tell us why Mark would include this story. There are some men who claim the young man was Mark himself, which is why he included the story in his biography of Jesus. However, that is pure conjecture.

Perhaps the young man was awakened when Jesus and his apostles departed from the room where they had the last supper. And wanting to follow them, he did not have time to get fully clothed. Hence, he simply covered himself with the linen cloth with which he followed behind. Of course, that too is only a conjecture.

Jesus is taken to the high priest

- **And they led Jesus away to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scholars assemble with him. And Peter followed him from a distance, as far as inside the courtyard of the high priest, and was sitting with the subordinates, and warming himself near the light** (Mark 14:53-54).

All the apostles were scattered, but Peter and John did follow him from a distance. For John’s biography of Jesus says, “**And Simon Peter followed Jesus, also the other disciple [John]. But that disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus**

into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter had stood near the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the door-keeper and brought in Peter” (John 18:15-16). Remember, Peter, James, and John were apparently the most worthy of the apostles, and were later called pillars by the church (see Galatians 2:9).

Witnesses against Jesus

- **Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, and did not find it. For many testified falsely against him, and their testimonies were not consistent.**
- **And some men having stood up, testified falsely against him, saying, We heard him saying, I will destroy this temple made with hands, and by three days I will build another not made with hands. And not even this way was their testimony consistent** (Mark 14:55-59).

Those hypocritical rulers tried to justify themselves by putting Jesus on trial, but they could find no evidence to condemn him. Even though they brought false witnesses, none of them gave anything the rulers could use against him. Witnesses who are inconsistent in their testimony lose their credibility and their usefulness as witnesses.

Mark says some men stood up and accused Jesus about the temple, but Matthew is more specific and says they were two men (see Matthew 26:61). Those false witnesses misquoted Jesus in their accusation, accusing him of saying if that temple made with hands were destroyed he would raise up another not made with hands. Jesus had actually said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). Jesus was referring to the temple of his body, not the temple of God. Hence, their testimony was not consistent with the facts.

Jesus acknowledges he is the Christ

- **And the high priest having stood up in the midst, he demanded Jesus, saying, Thou answer nothing? What is it these men testify against thee? But he remained silent, and answered nothing. Again the high priest demanded him, and says to him, Are thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am. And ye will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky.**
- **And the high priest having torn his clothes, he says, What further need have we of witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy. What does it seem to you? And they all condemned him to be deserving of death** (Mark 14:60-64).

In desperation the high priest asked him directly if he was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed (meaning God). And Jesus did not hesitate to say he was. Matthew quoted Jesus responding with the words, **“Thou have said”** (Matthew 26:64), which means yes. Notice however, Mark quoted Jesus saying, **“I am.”** And Luke quotes Jesus saying, **“Ye say that I am”** (Luke 22:70), which also means yes.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke uses slightly different words when they quote Jesus' answer to the high priest. (John does not report that dialogue.) That is further evidence that in the Bible it is the meaning of what a man says, and not his exact words that are important when he is quoted. That is more evidence to justify translating the Bible to other languages.

Nevertheless, translators do not have the right to paraphrase the Bible record. They are obligated to translate as literally as possible within the limits of the languages. The authors of the Bible were divinely inspired, and therefore had the approval of the Holy Spirit to paraphrase. Translators are not divinely inspired and do not have that approval. The so-called dynamic equivalent method of translating (which means much paraphrasing and loose translating) that is used so frequently in modern translations is a perversion.

When Jesus answered the high priest, he also emphasized his claim by prophesying that they would see him sitting at the right hand of Power, meaning God the Father. And they would see him coming in the clouds of the sky, which refers to the end of the world.

His confession about being the Christ, the Son of God, was enough to condemn him in the sight of those men, because they did not believe him. Therefore, they charged him with blasphemy. They would not even consider any evidence he could offer to prove his claim because their hearts were too hardened and their minds were closed. Remember, they had already judged and condemned him before that sham trial.

Incidentally, in the Bible when it says a man tore his clothes, that was a sign he was extremely troubled. (Such tears were no doubt at a seam in the cloth so the garment could easily be repaired.) For example, when Jacob saw the evidence suggesting his son Joseph had been killed, the record says, **"And Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days"** (Genesis 37:34).

The beginning of his abuse

- **And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him with a fist, and to say to him, Prophecy. And the subordinates were throwing him with slaps** (Mark 14:65).

Abusing Jesus that way shows how uncivilized were those rulers of the Jews. No American judge would ever treat a prisoner that way, even when he was found guilty. If any judge did those things he would be impeached, and probably even charged with assault.

Mark says they covered his face when they demanded he prophesy who struck him. John also says that Jesus had been bound by those who arrested him: **"So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound him ..."** (John 18:12). Binding a prisoner is used against dangerous criminals. They bound Jesus only to humiliate him.

Peter denies Jesus

- **And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest comes. And having seen Peter warming himself, having looked at**

him, she says, Thou also were with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, nor understand what thou say.

- **And he went outside onto the porch, and a cock sounded. And the servant girl having seen him, she began again to say to those who stood by, This man is from them. But he again denied it.**
- **And after a little while again those who stood by said to Peter, Surely thou are from them, for thou are a Galilean, and thy accent is similar.**
- **But he began to curse and to swear, I do not know this man of whom ye speak. And the second time a cock sounded. And Peter remembered the saying that Jesus said to him, Before a cock sounds twice, thou will deny me thrice. And having broke down, he wept (Mark 14:66-72).**

Peter not only denied him, but he cursed vehemently and swore about it. Nevertheless, that was the only time in his life that Peter ever denied Jesus. And he never lost faith in him. I believe Jesus allowed Peter to be tempted that way because Peter disputed with him. And it was a way to both humble Peter, and teach him that Jesus is never wrong.

After Peter remembered what Jesus said about denying him, he went outside and wept; Matthew says he wept bitterly (see Matthew 26:75). He wept bitterly because he did not want to fail Jesus. The weakness of his flesh caused him to stumble. Peter loved Jesus, and he wept bitterly because he failed him. Nevertheless, that experience not only humbled Peter, but it increased his faith in Jesus, so that he always accepted what Jesus said, even if he did not understand it.

Nazareth was in the province of Galilee. That is why Jesus could be called both a Galilean and a Nazarene. Notice how one of those who accused Peter of being one of Jesus' disciples said his accent made him apparent. Even Americans have different accents for different parts of the country.

Taking Jesus to Pilate

- **And straightaway in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scholars and the whole council, having made a plan, after binding Jesus, they took him away, and delivered him up to Pilate (Mark 15:1).**

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. Those rulers of the Jews needed to take Jesus to Pilate to get permission to have him put to death. The Romans had taken that authority from them, probably because the Jews were using it against the occupation. The plan those Jewish rulers made probably included using a crowd of people there to also demand the crucifixion of Jesus, because that is what happened.

Binding Jesus was completely unnecessary. It was just another way to humiliate him and make him look bad. Shrewd defense lawyers craft the appearance of their clients to make them look good in court in order to influence those who judge them. Those evil rulers tried to make Jesus look bad in front of Pilate.

Jesus is accused before the governor

- **And Pilate questioned him, Are thou the king of the Jews? And having answered, he said to him, Thou say. And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again questioned him, saying, Thou answer nothing? Behold how many things they testify against thee. But Jesus answered nothing any more, so as for Pilate to wonder (Mark 15:2-5).**

Remember, it was necessary for the rulers of the Jews to persuade the Roman governor to crucify Jesus. For the Romans did not allow them to put any man to death. Therefore, they brought Jesus to him. The record does not tell how those rulers accused Jesus, but they must have mentioned his claim to be the king of the Jews. And when the governor asked Jesus if he were the king of the Jews, Jesus said **“Thou say,”** which means yes.

Pilate wondered because Jesus did not answer any of the accusations against him. And that was exceedingly unusual, especially among the argumentative Jews. No doubt Pilate was expecting the usual wrangling between disputants, but Jesus would not even deny their charges. He would not be a part of a useless verbal brawl. And I suspect that during that trial the governor developed greater respect for Jesus and more contempt for the Jews, because Jesus was so much more dignified than his accusers.

The tradition of releasing one prisoner

- **Now during a feast he released to them one prisoner, whomever they requested (Mark 15:6).**

The law of Moses commanded the people to have three feasts annually, although the Jews have later added to that number. This particular feast, the Passover feast, was the first one commanded of them.

The Bible says nothing about the origin of the custom to release one prisoner during a feast. It was never part of the law of Moses. Indeed, it was actually against the justice promoted by the law. For there is nothing in the law of Moses about such pardons, although for some things a man could redeem himself with a ransom.

Here is one law about that: **“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death. If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him. Whether it has gored a son, or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him”** (Exodus 21:28-31). Apparently in such a case, the family of the victim was allowed to impose a ransom in place of the death penalty.

However, for crimes like murder and manslaughter (traditionally defined) no ransom could be given: **“Moreover ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And ye shall take no ransom for**

him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest” (Numbers 35:31-32).

Nevertheless, whether just or not the governor agreed to that custom, no doubt to help pacify the Jews during the times of those gathers, which were the most dangerous ones for riots to occur against the Roman occupation.

The people reject Jesus

- **And a man who was called Barabbas was with the rebels who were bound, men who had committed murder during the insurrection. And having cried aloud, the multitude began to ask as he was always doing for them.**
- **And Pilate answered them, saying, Do ye wish that I would release to you the king of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him up because of envy. But the chief priests incited the crowd, so that he would release Barabbas to them instead.**
- **And again having answered, Pilate said to them, What then do ye wish I would do to the man whom ye call the king of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. And Pilate said to them, For what evil has he done? But they cried out even more, Crucify him** (Mark 15:7-14).

The resentment toward the Roman occupation was no doubt the reason for the insurrection that Barabbas was part of, which was obviously unsuccessful. The record does not say that Barabbas was a leader of it. The Romans had probably already executed the leaders. The text says the men had committed murder during the insurrection. When men kill the opposition in wartime it is not called murder. However, the insurrection did not qualify as war because it was against the established authorities.

The chief priests were able to whip the multitudes into a frenzy to crucify Jesus and demand the release of Barabbas. Being in a crowd can often have an almost hypnotic effect on people. And when they are led by the wrong men, crowds can become very irrational and dangerous. As Solomon said, **“Scoffers set a city in a flame, but wise men turn away wrath”** (Proverbs 29:8).

Notice how the text says that Pilate knew the chief priests had delivered up Jesus because of envy. They were envious of him because many believed he was the Christ, and multitudes followed him. Moreover, Jesus was able to perform many miraculous healings, which brought him the admiration of the people. Besides those things, Jesus severely rebuked those rulers for their evils and their hypocrisies.

Jesus is condemned to be crucified

- **And Pilate, wanting to do what was sufficient for the crowd, released Barabbas to them. And he delivered Jesus, after scourging, so that he might be crucified** (Mark 15:15).

Pilate saw the danger that was developing in the multitude, and so he released the notorious criminal and sent the innocent man Jesus to be crucified. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but Pilate was also a spiritually weak man without much character. And to appease the crowd he sacrificed an innocent man.

Scourging was probably required for every man condemned to be crucified. Nevertheless, according to Luke's biography of Jesus, Pilate would have scourged Jesus even if the people had agreed to his release: **"And he said to them a third time, For what evil did this man do? I have found nothing guilty of death in him. I will therefore, having scourged, release him"** (Luke 23:22). He would have scourged Jesus as a way to help pacify the crowd.

The Roman soldiers mock and abuse Jesus

- **And the soldiers led him away inside the courtyard, which is the Praetorium, and they call together the whole band. And they put purple clothing on him, and clothe him with a woven crown of thorns, and began to salute him, Hail, king of the Jews!**
- **And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and bowing their knees worshiped him. And when they had mocked him, they took the purple garment off of him, and dressed him with his own garments. And they lead him out so that they might crucify him** (Mark 15:16-20).

We of the Western World, having been influenced for so long by the Christian way of life, consider the actions of those Roman soldiers to be cruel and barbaric. However, the fact is that most of the peoples of the world act that way. For example, every war we have fought in Asia resulted in the brutal treatment of our soldiers when they became prisoners, much worse treatment than what the Roman soldiers did to Jesus.

Putting a scarlet robe on Jesus, a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hand, then kneeling before him, were all done to mock him because he said he was the king of the Jews. In their eyes that was such a ridiculous claim that he deserved being ridiculed that way. I also believe those men enjoyed abusing Jesus, because they had a barbaric spirit. The world contains many men who enjoy being cruel.

It took enormous willpower for Jesus to restrain himself and endure that abuse. Every other man in such a situation is helpless. While Jesus could have stopped them in a moment, and he could have abused them even more severely. But Jesus quietly endured that suffering and humiliation for our sakes. He endured it because it was the will of the Father, and because Jesus loves us. All those things that happened were necessary for him to be able to redeem us from condemnation of our sins.

Remember how he prophesied those things would happen, saying to his apostles, **"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scholars. And they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles to ridicule, and to scourge, and to crucify. And the third day he will rise"** (Matthew 20:18-19).

Help carrying his cross

- **And they draft a certain Simon, a Cyrenian passing by coming from the countryside, the father of Alexander and Rufus, so that he would take his cross (Mark 15:21).**

Each condemned prisoner was required to carry his own cross. However, Jesus had been subjected to so much abuse that his body was no longer able to carry it. His spirit was willing but his flesh was made too weak. It was weak because he was beset by the limitations of a body of flesh just like every other man.

Mark says that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Simon was drafted to carry Jesus' cross simply because he happened to be available. We know nothing more about him, because there were other men with those names mentioned in the New Testament. Remember, Peter was called Simon before Jesus gave him that new name.

Jesus is crucified

- **And they bring him to the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but he did not take it. And having crucified him, they divided his garments, casting a lot for them, who would take what (Mark 15:22-24).**

The place was also called Golgotha in Matthew and John. Only Luke's biography of Jesus does not refer to it as Golgotha. John says Golgotha is a Hebrew word. All four of the biographies of Jesus call it the place of a skull. There are various theories to explain why. I will not conjecture about it.

That vinegar was sour wine, and Jesus had said to his apostles, **"But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"** (Matthew 26:29). Therefore, he would not drink the vinegar.

Crucifying him in the presence of his enemies, and dividing his garments and casting a lot, were all prophesied in the old testament: **"For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot"** (Psalm 22:16-18).

The only possessions Jesus ever had during the time of his ministry were the clothes on his body. And he never required anyone to pay him for anything he did, including his miracles of healing. He accepted food that was offered to him, and temporary lodging, and no doubt also clothing when if needed it, but nothing else.

The book of John says they divided all of his garments except for his tunic. His tunic was a seamless weave, which is why they did not want to divide it, but instead they cast a lot for it (See John 19:23-24). Dividing his garments among them was proof he was crucified naked.

The rulers were able to crucify Jesus because they arrested him away from the temple and those who supported him. They were able because most of the Jews were largely indiffer-

ent to Jesus and his preaching about the kingdom of God. That is why the people of Jerusalem did not rise up to save him when Jesus was condemned and crucified. You may not be aware that the majority of modern Jews are atheists, including the Israelis.

The inscription over his head

- **And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the inscription of his accusation was inscribed, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And they crucify two robbers with him, one at his right hand, and one at his left (Mark 15:25-27).**

The complete words of the accusation over his head were, THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. We know that the words “the Nazarene” were also there, because they were included in John’s record of the accusation (see John 19:19). And in Matthew’s record of the accusation he includes the words “This is Jesus” (see Matthew 27:37). Remember, it is often necessary to read other passages in order to obtain more complete or detailed knowledge about things in the Bible. Never expect a passage about something in the Bible to always be complete about the subject.

Therefore, beware of false teachers, because they commonly quote one or two passages to justify what they say, when further reading shows their conclusions to be false. Remember how Satan quoted a scripture to tempt Jesus (see Matthew 4:6). If a Bible is available for you, then study it for yourself, because you are going to be judged by what you do.

Matthew says there were two robbers crucified with him, one on each side. However, there is evidence of more than two other men being crucified at the same time. I speak more about that in my comments on Luke’s record of the crucifixion (see Luke 23).

Reckoned with lawless men

- **And the scripture was fulfilled, which says, And he was reckoned with lawless men (Mark 15:28).**

The scripture that Mark mentioned is from Isaiah 53:12. It is part of a lengthy passage that describes what the Messiah would be like, and how much he would suffer and be rejected. I quote that entire passage below:

“Behold, my servant shall deal wisely. He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him. For that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall understand.

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as him from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him. He has put him to grief.

“When thou shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed. He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied. By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

The passage in Isaiah that says **“they made his grave with the wicked”** is how he was **“reckoned with lawless men.”** Having been crucified with criminals means Jesus was truly reckoned with lawless men. However, the grave of Jesus was not literally with the wicked, because the man in whose sepulcher he was buried was a righteous man, as Mark says farther in this book. They made his grave with the wicked by having him killed with wicked men.

The words “made his grave” are clearly figurative. They are similar to the modern words that say a man dug his own grave, which means he caused his own end. The rulers of the Jews made his grave with the wicked by having him crucified with lawless men. And by doing, they “dug their own grave.”

The observers mock Jesus

- **And those who passed by railed at him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ha! Thou who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross.**
- **Likewise also the chief priests mocking among each other with the scholars said, He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe in him. And those who were crucified with him reviled him** (Mark 15:29-32).

The psalm that mentioned how they divided his garments also speaks about how he was ridiculed and crucified: **“Many bulls have encompassed me. Strong bulls of Bashan**

have beset me around. They gape upon me with their mouth, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws, and thou have brought me into the dust of death.

“For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot” (Psalm 22:12-18).

The bulls and the dogs that are mentioned in that psalm were the Jews. And they included the chief priests, the scholars, the elders, and the Pharisees—all rulers of the Jews—as well as those who passed by, and even the robbers who were crucified with him. Indeed, the Bible record indicates that only his apostle John with a few of his women disciples were there with him (see John 19:25-26). His other loyal disciples were not there because of the danger they faced. For this was a time when the Jews were bolder in their aggression toward his followers. John was safer because he was known to the high priest (see John 18:15).

When the rulers of the Jews said that if he came down from the cross they would believe him, they were lying. They were speaking like their father the devil. For nothing that Jesus could do would make those men believe in him. Believing in him means more than recognizing his divinity; it means having faith and trust in him. For James said, **“Thou believe that there is one God, thou do well. The demons also believe, and shudder”** (James 2:19).

The hearts of those rulers were too hardened to ever have faith and trust in Jesus. If he had come down from the cross, they would have claimed it was the power of the devil in him, just as they said about him when he cast out demons (see Matthew 12:24).

Jesus asks God why he forsook him

- **And having become the sixth hour, darkness occurred over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a great voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?** (Mark 15:33-34).

The sixth hour in the time of the Jews was noon according to our time, and the ninth hour was 3 PM. The darkness was probably caused by thick clouds. And that darkness probably symbolized the spiritual darkness caused by rejecting God and his will for us. And that rejection was made full by rejecting Jesus Christ the Son of God.

There is controversy about the language used in these words that Jesus spoke: **“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.”** Some say it is Hebrew, some say it is Syriac, and some say it is neither. And whether it was understood by the spectators is not clear either. For some said he was calling for Elijah, which does not seem to make much sense if they understood what he actually said.

The question Jesus asked God was for our sake not for his. It is a question that we should all seek to answer: Why did God forsake his only begotten Son on the cross? He forsook

him to be crucified so that Jesus could qualify to become our Redeemer and save our souls. That is why Jesus allowed himself to be there.

God forsook his Son to be crucified, but he never departed from him. For Jesus said to his apostles at the time of the last supper, **“Behold, the hour comes, and now has come, that ye will be scattered, each man to his own things, and ye will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me”** (John 16:32).

Bringing vinegar to Jesus

- **And some of those who stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calls Elijah. And one having ran, and having filled a sponge of vinegar, and having placed it on a reed, gave him to drink, saying, Leave be. We might see if Elijah comes to take him down** (Mark 15:35-36).

They thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save him because Elijah was taken up directly into heaven without having ever died. And the Old Testament says that God would send Elijah back to the people: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6). However, Jesus said that prophecy applied to John the immerser (see Matthew 11:14), who came in the spirit of Elijah, not Elijah himself.

The vinegar was sour wine. When the passage says he gave him to drink, that means Jesus merely tasted what it was. For remember, Jesus had earlier said to his apostles, **“But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”** (Matthew 26:29). Therefore, he did not drink it.

The man brought vinegar to Jesus because John reported Jesus saying **“I thirst”** (John 19:28). However, why the man brought vinegar to drink is not clear. Perhaps the vinegar contained enough alcohol in it to provide some relief from the pain. If that is the case, then the man was being compassionate toward Jesus.

Some of them wanted to see if Elijah would come to take him down. Remember, when Jesus cried out in a great voice some of the spectators thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save him.

Jesus expired

- **And having given out a great voice, Jesus expired. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom** (Mark 15:37-38).

What Jesus said when he cried out again in a great voice was probably the same words, **“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani,”** although the record does not tell. Whatever he said were his last words before he died, which is what happens when our spirit is yielded up. His body of flesh perished, but not his divine spirit. And so it is with every man when he dies. For when Solomon was describing how we age and die, he said, **“... and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

When Jesus perished, that completed his life of perfect sacrifice in obedience to the Father. It only remained (1) for Jesus to be resurrected the third day, (2) for him to appear to his apostles and some of his disciples as proof of his resurrection, (3) for him to give authority for his apostles to establish the kingdom (the church), (4) to ascend into heaven in the sight of many of his disciples, and (5) then to reign over all things with the Father at his right hand.

That curtain of the temple was no doubt the one that separated the holy place from the most holy place (also called the holy of holies). The most holy place was where the ark of the covenant was kept. Only the high priest was allowed in there, and that was only for one day per year bringing blood of animal sacrifices, which was on the day of atonement. Only the priests were allowed in the holy place, but they went in there every day of the year.

Christians are now the priests of God, and the new holy place is the church. Christ is our high priest, and heaven is now the most holy place. And the torn curtain symbolizes our access to heaven through the blood of Christ, which access we enter when we too are resurrected to the afterlife. The book of Hebrews tells much more about those things.

The centurion was convinced about him

- **And when the centurion, who stood from opposite him, saw that he expired, having cried out this way, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God** (Mark 15:39).

That centurion and those with him witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, which means they saw many of the things that happened. And it so impressed them that the centurion believed Jesus must have been the Son of God. The Gentiles believed in many gods. And they believed that the gods sometimes interacted with the affairs of the world. Greek mythology contains many such stories. Therefore, it is not surprising that the centurion was convinced. His heart was obviously not hardened against Jesus. And so, unlike the rulers of the Jews, he could objectively judge those events.

Indeed, that humble Roman soldier was more righteous than all of those rulers of the Jews, because Luke says about him, “... **he glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was righteous**” (Luke 23:47). There is always a minority of people who love justice and righteousness. That Roman soldier was one of them because he judged Jesus rightly. And we can only hope that he eventually became a disciple of Christ.

The women who were watching

- **And there were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the small man, and of Joses, and Salome; women who also followed him and served him when he was in Galilee, also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem** (Mark 15:40-41).

Although the Bible record focuses on the apostles of Jesus, as the above passage says there were many women who followed him from Galilee serving him. And Mark names three of them who were watching when Jesus died. There were many others who had been there,

including his mother Mary. They may have departed before the end because it was too grievous for them to watch him die in so cruel a way.

The men disciples were not there because they were in much more danger from the Jews than the women were. For with Jesus being condemned to crucifixion the Jews were much bolder in their persecution of the disciples, especially of his apostles. The enemies of Jesus could now attack them in the absence of the multitudes that were always around Jesus. Only the apostle John was at the crucifixion because he was known by the high priest, and consequently was less vulnerable to attack.

I suspect the rulers of the Jews wanted the population to think Jesus was condemned and crucified by the Romans so that they would get the blame. Thus, exonerating the rulers of the Jews from any responsibility. Such a deception is still being promoted even in modern times. For it is only in the Bible record that the truth is proclaimed. Examine what the world thinks, and you will see.

Jesus is buried

- **And now having become evening, since it was the Preparation, that is, pre-sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea came, an honorable councilman who also himself was awaiting the kingdom of God, emboldened, he went in near Pilate, and requested the body of Jesus.**
- **And Pilate wondered if he died already. And having summoned the centurion, he questioned him if he was already dead. And having ascertained from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.**
- **And having bought fine linen, and having taken him down, he wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher, being that which had been hewn out of rock. And he rolled a stone to the door of the sepulcher. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid (Mark 15:42-47).**

The day of Preparation was Friday because the law of Moses forbade food preparation on the sabbath. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon. Jesus died sooner than normal probably because his body was so weakened even before he was crucified. Remember, he had no sleep the night of his betrayal. He went through much mental agony in anticipation of his ordeal. And he was subject to much flogging and other kinds of abuse. Thus, his body was just not able to endure a prolonged crucifixion.

Mark says that Joseph of Arimathaea was “**an honorable councilman who also himself was awaiting the kingdom of God ...**.” There were other leaders of the Jews who did believe in Jesus, but they were in the minority. It took great courage for Joseph to bury Jesus in his own new sepulcher. It took courage because the rulers of the Jews learned about it.

That sepulcher was an artificial cave created by Joseph. Both natural and artificial caves were commonly used as sepulchers. For example, the Bible says “**Abraham buried**

Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan” (Genesis 23:19).

Apparently only two of the women who were there when Jesus died saw his burial at the tomb: Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. They all loved Jesus greatly, but not all of them wanted to see him die and be buried that way. I suspect it was too emotionally overwhelming for them to endure.

Regarding his resurrection

There were many other things that happened during the time of his resurrection. Each of the four biographies of Jesus give their own individual reports, all of which vary about some things. I put all of what they testified together in a summary, which you can read in my commentary of John’s biography of him (see John 20).

Women go to anoint his body

- **And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that having come, they might anoint him. And very much early morning on the first day of the week, they come near to the sepulcher when the sun was risen (Mark 16:1-2).**

Those three were among the most devoted of his women disciples, and they loved him very much. Therefore, they wanted to do what they could to care for his body. Even though they knew they were unable to roll away the stone, they went anyway. No doubt, like all people of faith, they trusted that God would provide for them.

Regarding the condition of a decaying body, remember what Martha said to Jesus about Lazarus: **“Lord, he smells now, for it is the fourth day”** (John 11:39). However, Jesus had not been in the sepulcher anywhere near that long. Remember, it was probably closer to about twenty-seven or twenty-eight hours. (See Matthew 12:38-40 for my comments about how long Jesus was in the sepulcher.) Therefore, even though the women believed that he was still dead, they did not expect his body to smell when they came.

The women learn he was raised

- **And they said to themselves, Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the sepulcher? And having looked, they see that the stone has been rolled back, for it was very large.**
- **And having entered into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he says to them, Be not alarmed. Ye seek Jesus, the man of Nazareth who was crucified. He was raised. He is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him (Mark 16:3-6).**

It probably took several strong men to roll that large stone to cover the opening of the sepulcher after the body of Jesus was laid there. The passage says the young man they saw in

the sepulcher was sitting on the right side. That probably means he was sitting on the right side of a slab upon which the body of Jesus had been laid. That young man was obviously an agent of heaven. Agents of heaven always appeared as men, and never as women, and they have no wings. Artists have greatly deceived the world about them.

The women were naturally alarmed to see him there, but he reassured them. He also spoke words of comfort to them, telling them Jesus was raised. He meant raised from the dead, and he gave them evidence of it by telling them to see the place where they laid him.

Commanded to inform his disciples

- **But go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goes before you into Galilee. Ye will see him there, just as he said to you (Mark 16:7).**

After testifying of Jesus' resurrection, the agent then commanded them to report it to his disciples and Peter. The agent told them Jesus would go before them into Galilee. Remember, during the last supper Jesus told his apostles that after his resurrection he would go ahead of them into Galilee: **"But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee"** (Mark 14:28). That was where he began his ministry. Nevertheless, it was at Bethany near Jerusalem where Jesus later ascended into heaven in their sight.

The agent mentioned Jesus' disciples and Peter. Peter was singled out from them probably because Jesus had given him the keys of the kingdom. For Peter would soon be opening the doors of the kingdom of God to all who believed in Jesus as the Christ.

They fled from the sepulcher

- **And having come out, they fled from the sepulcher, and trembling and astonishment seized them. And they said nothing to any man, for they were afraid (Mark 16:8).**

Those three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, fled from the sepulcher because the agent commanded them to go and report to Jesus' disciples and Peter. They were trembling and astonished because they had seen an agent from heaven, and he told them Jesus was raised from the dead. They no doubt said nothing to any man, because they were afraid lest they be hindered in their obedience to the heavenly agent.

Not believing the witnesses

- **Now having risen early morning on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. That woman, having gone, informed those who became with him, as they mourned and wept. And those men, when they heard that he is alive, and was seen by her, did not believe.**
- **And after these things he appeared in a different form to two of them as they walked going into the countryside. And those men having departed, they reported to the others. Neither did they believe those men.**

- **Afterward he became visible to them, to the eleven, who were relaxing. And he upbraided their unbelief and hard heart, because they did not believe those who saw him after he was raised** (Mark 16:9-14).

Mark says Jesus had first appeared to Mary Magdalene who had gone to the sepulcher (see John 20:11). He later appeared to two men (see Luke 24:13-35). Yet the apostles did not believe any of those witnesses.

It was not until the time of evening that Jesus appeared to them. He had delayed revealing himself to his apostles until evening (see John 20:19) to give them the opportunity to accept the testimony of witnesses. Yet their unbelief and hard heart kept them from accepting that testimony. Therefore, Jesus **“upbraided their unbelief and hard heart.”**

Jesus had chosen those men to be his apostles, and to be witnesses of him and his resurrection. They were to go out (after he ascended back to heaven) to establish his church and proclaim his good news of salvation. It would be necessary for those who heard them to accept their testimony if they were going to make disciples.

How then could they expect others to accept their testimony, if they would not accept the testimony of each other? They deserved being upbraided for their unbelief and hard heart. They needed to strengthen their own faith. And that rebuke was no doubt intended to help them. And it is also a good lesson for us all.

The Great Commission

- **And he said to them, Having gone into all the world, preach ye the good news to the whole creation. He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned** (Mark 16:15-16).

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. The good news of Christ is not just some religious idea. It is a way of life that includes an entire way of thinking. It transforms the souls of men from sinfulness to righteousness. Wherever the message of the New Testament has been proclaimed and accepted, it exalts the people and their society, and it promotes their prosperity.

Notice how Jesus said that believers who are immersed (in water for the remission of their sins) will be saved, but unbelievers will be damned. Regarding unbelievers, it makes no difference whether they are immersed or not. Their lack of faith alone condemns them. That command of Jesus to immerse believers is very widely disobeyed by those who claim to believe in him.

Those who apply the ritual they call baptism (a word transliterated from the Greek word BAPTISMOS that means immersion) to both adults and infants by sprinkling or pouring water on them are clearly not making disciples of Christ. And other preachers who claim faith alone is all Jesus requires are not making disciple of Christ either. All such men are leading people astray.

Dear reader, be not deceived by them. Obey the commands of Jesus, not those of men who teach otherwise, regardless of how pious and sincere they appear. Obey and teach what Jesus said: **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved.”** (That passage only applies to believers, not to children too young to believe. God judges them by their inborn

knowledge of good and evil. I explain much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.)

And the immersion required for our salvation is in water for the remission of sins. Consider this passage about the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch: **“And Philip having opened his mouth, and having begun from this scripture, he preached the good news to him—the man Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch says, Look, water! What prevents me to be immersed?”** (Acts 8:35-36). And Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38).

The Holy Spirit is a gift given to us when we become Christians. It means the Spirit of God dwells in us. For Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). That does not mean, however, that we receive supernatural powers. Such powers were special gifts of the Holy Spirit that some disciples received only during the time of the apostles. I speak more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Miraculous signs

- **And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons. They will speak in new tongues. They will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will, no, not harm them. They will lay hands on the feeble, and they will fare well** (Mark 16:17-18).

Jesus said those who believe (1) would speak new tongues, (2) would not be harmed by serpents or poisonous drink, and (3) would heal the feeble by laying their hands upon them. Those signs would accompany them as they preached the good news of Christ. They would have those supernatural powers to prove that God was with them. And many of the early disciples were able to do those things. However, only the apostles (including Paul) were able to endow others with those powers. Those miraculous powers only lasted during the time of the apostles and those to whom they had given them. They have never existed since then. And every man who claims otherwise is a fraud and an enemy of Christ.

For those powers were only given to demonstrate the authenticity of the good news of Christ before the New Testament was written. Now that we have that written record, those signs are no longer needed. The Bible itself is sufficient evidence of the truth of Christ and his good news. It is sufficient evidence for every soul who has the kind of spirit that God wants; namely, those who are Jesus' sheep. For Jesus said, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:27-28). And we now hear the voice of Jesus in the words of the New Testament.

The Lord working jointly

- **Therefore indeed, the Lord, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And those men, having gone**

forth, they preached everywhere, the Lord working jointly, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Truly (Mark 16:19-20).

The Lord worked jointly with them through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **“I have spoken these things to you while remaining with you. But the helper, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you”** (John 14:25-26). I speak much more about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The Lord also confirmed the word of the good news they proclaimed by the signs they were able to perform. Jesus had said that was the way God witnessed for him: **“The works that I do in my Father’s name, these testify about me”** (John 10:25). Those works were primarily the mighty miracles of healing that he performed. They proved that Jesus had been sent by God, because only the power of God could do such things. Unlike popular mythology, the devil has no supernatural powers. He has no supernatural powers unless God gives them to him, as in the example of Job.

The testimony of the Bible is sufficient now for our faith. That is clearly taught in this passage about the rich man in Hades: **“And he said, I beg thee therefore, father [Abraham], that thou would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, No, father Abraham, but if some man would go to them from the dead they will repent. And he said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead”** (Luke 16:27-31).

Those miracles from God during the time of Christ and the early church were needed because the new testament was not yet written. Now that we have the new testament record, those miracles are no longer given. Let no man deceive you.

A Commentary on The Biography of Jesus by Luke

Information about the issue of his authorship is widely available, and so I will not comment about it. Suffice to say the great majority of scholars agree that Luke wrote this biography of Jesus. He later wrote the book of Acts, which is a history of the early church. Some people believe Luke was a Gentile who became a proselyte, but nobody knows.

Luke addresses both books to Theophilus, which word is a combination of theos, which means god, and phileo, which means love. Hence, Theophilus was a man who loved God. Theophilus appears to have been a real man, although that name was probably a special descriptive one given to him by Luke. Something like the one Jesus gave to Simon, whom Jesus called Peter, from the Greek word petros which means rock.

Many of the comments I make here in this biography of Jesus are what I said about the same events that are recorded in the other three biographies of him.

Salutation to Theophilus

- **Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to arrange in order a narration about the deeds that have been brought to fullness among us, just as they delivered them to us, who became from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it occurred to me also, having followed closely from the beginning all things accurately, to write to thee in order, eminent Theophilus, so that thou might know the certainty of the declarations about which thou were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).**

Notice how Luke said he was writing his narration **“having followed closely from the beginning all things accurately.”** Notice also how Luke said that his narration was based upon the deeds that were delivered to him (and others) from those who **“became from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word.”** Contrary to the modern critics, Luke did not borrow any of the writings of the other biographers. Otherwise, he would have said so. Luke wrote this biography of Jesus from what was delivered to him by the **“eyewitness and servants of the word,”** those who had been with Jesus from the beginning.

Notice also how he emphasized the accuracy of what he was reporting, because he wanted Theophilus to **“know the certainty of the declarations about which [he was] instructed.”** His biography of Jesus is based upon factual and reliable testimony. And that is also true of his history of the early church, which he describes in the book of Acts.

Every man who wrote any part of the Bible was zealous to report true and accurate words. For Paul said, **“Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction, for reproof, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, so that the man of God may be qualified, having been completed for every good work”** (Second Timothy 3:16-17). And there is no doubt that God’s Holy Spirit also guided the men who selected the books to comprise the Bible. God would never have allowed his holy word for us to be corrupted with false additions.

Zacharias and Elizabeth

- **It came to pass in the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest, named Zacharias, from the division of Abijah, and his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, going in all the commandments and righteous things of the Lord blameless. And there was no child to them because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in their days (Luke 1:5-7).**

Every priest was required to be a descendant of Levi. And every man of the high-priesthood was required to be a descendent of Aaron, who was himself a descendent of Levi. Therefore, both Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were born into the family of priests. Moreover, they were both righteous and obedient to the commandments and righteous things of the Lord. When the text says they were blameless that does not mean they were sinless. They were blameless in the sense of not being guilty of violating the law.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth was barren into her advanced years, and so they had no child. And not having a child was especially grievous to a woman in Bible times. For that was considered their primary goal in life. Read the story of Hannah for a good example of that (see the beginning of First Samuel).

Zacharias' priestly service

- **But it came to pass during his service as a priest in the course of his division in the presence of God, that, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to burn incense after entering into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense (Luke 1:8-10).**

Zacharias was not only a Levite, but he was of the high-priesthood family. He was also actively involved in the service of the temple. And he had been chosen at that time to be the one to burn incense in the temple. Since Aaron had perished many centuries before, that duty was performed by one of his descendents. And in this case it was Zacharias, who had been chosen by lot for that particular time. See First Chronicles 23:27-24:5 to see how David had established divisions in the high-priesthood family because they had grown so numerous.

Here is the law about burning incense in the tabernacle and for the temple that later replaced it: **“And thou shall make an altar to burn incense upon. Thou shall make it of acacia wood. A cubit shall be the length of it, and a cubit the breadth of it (it shall be foursquare), and two cubits shall be the height of it. The horns of it shall be of one piece with it. And thou shall overlay it with pure gold, the top of it, and the sides of it round about, and the horns of it.**

“And thou shall make to it a crown of gold round about. And two golden rings thou shall make for it under the crown of it, upon the two ribs of it, upon the two sides of it thou shall make them. And they shall be for places for staves with which to bear it. And thou shall make the staves of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.

“And thou shall put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee. And Aaron shall burn in it incense of sweet spices. Every morning, when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn it.

“And when Aaron lights the lamps at evening, he shall burn it, a perpetual incense before Jehovah throughout your generations. Ye shall offer no strange incense on it, nor burnt offering, nor meal offering. And ye shall pour no drink offering on it” (Exodus 30:1-9).

In many countries in Asia incense is still commonly burned by people to their pagan gods.

An agent of the Lord appears to him

- **And an agent of the Lord became visible to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zacharias having seen, was shaken, and fear fell upon him. But the agent said to him, Fear not, Zacharias, because thy plea was heard, and thy wife Elizabeth will bear a son for thee. And thou shall call his name John.**
- **And there will be joy and exultation for thee, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he should, no, not drink wine and strong drink. And he will be filled of the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s belly.**
- **And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go ahead, in front of him, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn back the hearts of fathers toward children, and the disobedient in a mentality of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared** (Luke 1:11-17).

Zacharias was going to be blessed with a son in his old age because God heard his plea. Zacharias had obviously prayed for his wife, and God eventually hearkened to him. Therefore, the child’s birth would be a great joy for him. And many would rejoice at his birth, because Elizabeth had many relatives and kin, who no doubt grieved with her about her barrenness.

The heavenly agent commanded Zacharias to call the child John, and the child was forbidden to drink any alcoholic beverage. That restriction was part of the vow of the Nazirite described in the law of Moses (see Numbers 6). However, the Nazirite was not to cut his hair during the time of his vow, but the agent said nothing about John’s hair. Therefore, John was not necessarily a Nazirite. John would be a member of the high-priesthood, because he was the son of Zacharias.

The agent from God also prophesied about John’s greatness. For John would be filled of the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s belly. The only way men can now have the Holy Spirit in them is by becoming a disciple of Christ (see Acts 13:52). I say much more about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I have an entire chapter

there about the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, even though John was filled of the Holy Spirit there is no record he ever had supernatural powers beyond being able to prophesy.

John was the fulfillment of this prophecy: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6). John would come **“in the spirit and power of Elijah”**; he was not the original Elijah. And John would precede Christ in proclaiming the coming kingdom of God, which would prepare that generation for the coming of the Christ.

Moreover, John would prepare the people by promoting their repentance. He would turn back the hearts of fathers toward children. Righteous men have their hearts toward caring for children and teaching them properly. Sinful men neglect children, and instead live selfishly and indulgently, neglecting the vital task of training the next generation to be righteous.

John would also turn the hearts of the disobedient to the mentality of the righteous. Sinners and righteous souls do not think the same way. True repentance involves a change of heart as well as a change of behavior. And that change of heart involves a different way of thinking. There is much written in the New Testament about that difference in mentality, especially in the writings of the apostle Paul.

By causing people to repent of their sins and have righteous hearts that would prepare them to accept the good news of Christ. Of course, as with the efforts of every prophet, including Jesus himself, John was only partially successful. For there were many who ignored his preaching, including most of the leading men of the Jews.

Zacharias had doubts

- **And Zacharias said to the agent, How will I know this? For I am aged, and my wife is advanced in her days. And having answered, the agent said to him, I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. And I was sent to speak to thee, and to announce these good news to thee.**
- **And behold, thou will be mute, and not able to speak until that day these things will come to pass, because thou did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time** (Luke 1:18-20).

Although Zacharias had pleaded with God for his wife, and he knew the man who appeared to him was a heavenly agent, yet he had doubts about what the agent prophesied. Zacharias certainly knew about the birth of Isaac when Abraham and Sarah were aged (see Genesis 21:7). Yet he wanted to know how such a thing could happen to him.

The agent who appeared in a vision to Zacharias was a high ranking one from God, and he gave him some wonderful news. But because Zacharias doubted, he was punished. The prophecy about John still remained, but the ability of Zacharias to speak was taken away from him until John was born.

The heavenly agent Gabriel is also mentioned in the book of Daniel, where he explained the meaning of a vision to Daniel (see Daniel 8:16).

Zacharias finally comes out of the temple

- **And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they wondered during his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they recognized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he was beckoning to them, and remained speechless (Luke 1:21-22).**

The first sign to Zacharias that the prophecy of the agent would be fulfilled was his immediate muteness. Therefore, all he was able to do was beckon to the people. It was then that they recognized he had seen a vision in the temple. How much Zacharias told them is not recorded in the history of this event, because this is the only book in the Bible that describes it, or even mentions the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth conceives

- **And it came to pass, when the days of his service were fulfilled, he departed to his house. And after these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she concealed herself five months, saying, Thus the Lord has done to me during the days in which he looked, to take away my shame among men (Luke 1:23-25).**

No doubt Zacharias informed his wife Elizabeth about everything that happened. The text says she concealed herself five months. That was probably the last five months of her pregnancy, which is the time she was most visibly pregnant. Why she did not want to appear during those five months is not told. She may have wanted to avoid being a spectacle because she was an aged woman who was pregnant, and that would have provoked laughter in those who saw her. For the Bible says about Sarah who was ninety years old when Isaac was born, **“And Sarah said, God has made me to laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh with me”** (Genesis 21:6). Elizabeth’s age is not given.

Elizabeth was already rejoicing even before the birth. For she had no doubts the prophecy would be fulfilled. No righteous soul would think Elizabeth should be ashamed for not bearing a child. Nevertheless, Elizabeth was ashamed, because her duty to bear and rear children had not been fulfilled. Remember, that was exceedingly important for women during Bible times. Remember the story of Hannah in the first part of First Samuel.

The agent Gabriel appears to Mary

- **Now in the sixth month the agent Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And the agent having come in near her, he said, Hail, thou who are highly favored. The Lord is with thee, thou who are blessed among women. But having seen, she was perplexed at his saying, and was pondering what kind of greeting this might be.**

- **And the agent said to her, Fear not, Mary, for thou have found favor with God. And behold, thou will conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son. And thou shall call his name JESUS. This man will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob into the ages. And of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:26-33).**

Mary was called a virgin before she bore Jesus. However, nowhere in the Bible was she ever called “the virgin Mary.” For she had four sons and at least two daughters after Jesus was born (see Matthew 13:55-56). Moreover, nowhere are we commanded to worship her, as the Roman Catholics do.

Nevertheless, Mary deserves being honored for the role she served in bringing Christ into the world. Gabriel even praised her by saying she was highly favored and God was with her. He also said she was blessed among women. He said that to her because she alone of all women of that generation had been chosen to bear the Son of God.

Of course, the young woman Mary was naturally perplexed at his saying, and wondered what it meant. Therefore, Gabriel assured her not to fear, because she had found favor with God. Both Joseph and Mary were poor, and they no doubt had little formal education. However, they were very righteous. And the character and quality of our spirit is far more important to God than anything about our worldly condition.

God wanted his only begotten Son to be reared in the world by righteous souls. And he obviously wanted him reared by humble and lowly people. Part of the duty of Christ was to live in the world with no special privileges, beyond having righteous parents. He was to live most of his life as an obscure carpenter in a poor country. For he needed to experience what common men do, yet he still lived without sin.

As Gabriel had done with Zacharias about Elizabeth, he prophesied about Mary’s conception, and he told her what to call the child. Moreover, as with Zacharias, Gabriel prophesied about what kind of man Jesus would be. And his description fit the prophecies about the coming Christ. Indeed, he said the child would **“be called the Son of the Most High.”** He also said that **“the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,”** and he would **“reign over the house of Jacob into the ages.”** He also said, **“And of his kingdom there will be no end.”** All of those things had been prophesied about the Christ.

Mary wondered how it would be

- **And Mary said to the agent, How will this be, since I know not a man? And having answered, the agent said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High will overshadow thee. Therefore also the holy thing that is begotten will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:34-35).**

Mary did not doubt what the agent of God told her, as Zacharias had done. She merely wondered how it would be, because she was still a virgin. Moreover, Zacharias had Abraham’s wife, Sarah, as a precedent for a child being born of an aged woman. But there had never been such a thing as a virgin bearing a child. And so Mary wondered. Consequently, Gabriel did not rebuke her for asking.

The Holy Spirit is part of the power of the Most High. God's Holy Spirit is given only to righteous souls. For remember, Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you"** (John 14:16-17).

The helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit. And it resides in every faithful disciple of Christ, because Paul said, **"Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?"** (First Corinthians 6:19).

Special powers of the Holy Spirit were also given to some of the early disciples of Christ. That enabled them to have some supernatural abilities, such as being able to speak a language never learned (called speaking in a tongue). That special power was given as evidence that God was with them.

However, such special powers were no longer given after the New Testament was written. They are not given because they are not needed. The testimony of the New Testament is now sufficient for faith in Christ.

That kind of power is what came upon Mary and overshadowed her. It was supernatural power from the Holy Spirit of the Most High God. And it was fulfillment of the prophecy that it would happen. Centuries before, Jehovah had told king Ahaz to ask a sign of him, one that was deep or high, meaning very profound. Jehovah wanted to show the king his supernatural power.

Here is the passage: **"And Jehovah spoke again to Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God, ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, nor will I test Jehovah."**

"And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David. Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:10-14).

Ahaz was a stubborn and rebellious king, and he refused to even ask for a sign. Therefore, Jehovah gave him the sign about the virgin birth. For such a thing is impossible without divine intervention. The artificial insemination used to impregnate women is not the same thing. For that is impossible without using the sperm (seed) of a man. And regardless of how a woman is impregnated by the sperm of a man she is no longer virgin when it happens.

Mary was never impregnated with the sperm of a man. Therefore, she remained a virgin even though she was pregnant with child. Consequently, Jesus had no biological father. His mother Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit of God, which made Jesus the Son of God in his flesh as well as in his Spirit. We the disciples of Christ are only sons of God in our spirits.

Gabriel tells Mary about Elizabeth

- **And behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman, she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For no word from God will be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the maid-servant of the Lord. May it happen to me according to thy word. And the agent departed from her (Luke 1:36-38).**

The agent of God did not appear to Mary until more than six months after he appeared to Zacharias. For remember, Elizabeth did not become with child until Zacharias finished with his priestly duties and had return to his home.

When Mary heard the explanation about how she would become with child, she submitted herself and willingly accepted that honor. However, that honor was not without painful consequences. For remember, when her betrothed husband Joseph learned of her condition, he wanted to put her away and not marry her. And no doubt there were other people who learned of her condition. An agent of God assured Joseph, but there is no record anyone else knew the reason for her pregnancy. And that meant Mary was subject to the shame and censure that comes with bearing a child while being unmarried.

Sinners of this decadent generation think nothing of unmarried mothers, and they treat them with just as much care and honor as with married mothers. But God strongly disapproves of having children without being married. And righteous souls look upon such women with shame and censure.

How much of that censure Mary anticipated is not known. Her first reaction to what Gabriel told her was complete submission and eagerness. And I have no doubt that whatever shame and censure she was subjected to, she remained submissive and eager to be the maid-servant of the Lord.

Regarding Elizabeth being a kinswoman of Mary, Elizabeth was of the ancestry of Levi, as well as being married to a Levite. Mary was (later) married to Joseph, who was of the tribe of Judah. However, Mary's ancestry must have also been of Levi, because she and Elizabeth were kinswomen.

The law of Moses allowed women to marry outside of the tribe of their birth. The only restriction about women marrying outside their tribe was that if they inherited lands, they could only marry a man of their own tribe. That law of Moses was given to prevent diluting the tribes. You can read more about it in the book of Numbers 35:2-9.

Mary goes to Elizabeth

- **And having risen in these days, Mary went with haste into the hill country, into a city of Judah, and entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her belly.**

- **And Elizabeth was filled of the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed in a great voice, and said, Blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy belly. And why is this to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For lo, when the voice of thy greeting happened in my ears, the babe leaped with joy in my belly. And blessed is she who believed, because there will be a fulfillment of the things that were spoken to her from the Lord (Luke 1:39-45).**

Since Elizabeth was a kinswoman of Mary, she was no doubt very desirous to go to her. And Mary was already pregnant when she went, because Elizabeth told how the unborn John in her belly leaped when she heard Mary's greeting. John leaped with joy in her belly because of the presence of the unborn Christ in the belly of Mary. Remember, Gabriel told Zacharias that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's belly.

Elizabeth was a righteous and humble woman, and she praised Mary for having that greater honor. Remember, Mary was much younger than Elizabeth. Indeed, Mary was probably more like a daughter to her (perhaps even like a granddaughter) because of the age difference. Yet Elizabeth praised Mary with more honor. Elizabeth humbly accepted that Mary had been blessed more than she was. She even exclaimed herself not worthy of being visited by Mary the mother of her Lord.

As soon as Mary entered the house and greeted Elizabeth, that is when the babe leaped in Elizabeth's belly. However, that was not when Elizabeth praised her. Although the passage says that Elizabeth was filled of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless Mary no doubt first told Elizabeth all about her visit by the agent Gabriel. For that knowledge was part of what Elizabeth said in praise to her. Otherwise Elizabeth would have been surprised by her own words, and would have wondered what they meant.

Elizabeth praised Mary for believing what Gabriel prophesied to her. And she expressed complete confidence in that prophecy. For remember, this was when Mary had first become pregnant, and there was no outward sign of her condition. Elizabeth accepted the testimony of Mary.

It was no doubt easier for her to believe in that virgin pregnancy because of her own pregnancy. The pregnancy of Mary was clearly supernatural. The pregnancy of Elizabeth was a great marvel, but such pregnancies could happen normally. Therefore it was not clearly supernatural, any more than the pregnancy of Abraham's wife Sarah was supernatural. Both of those pregnancies were from God, but the Bible teaches that every pregnancy is a gift from God.

Mary praises the Lord God

- **And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because he has looked upon the lowliness of his bondmaid. For behold, from henceforth all generations will regard me blessed, because the Mighty has done great things to me**
- **And his name is holy. And his mercy is for generations of generations to those who fear him. He did a mighty work by his arm. He scattered the**

proud in the mentality of their heart. He brought down potentates from thrones, and raised up lowly men. He filled those who are hungry with good things, and those who are rich he sent away empty. He helped his boy Israel to be reminded of mercy, just as he spoke to our fathers: to Abraham and his seed into the age.

- **And Mary dwelt with her about three months, and returned to her house** (Luke 1:46-56).

The passage about the praise that Elizabeth gave to Mary says that Elizabeth was filled of the Holy Spirit, meaning her words were divinely inspired. However, this passage about Mary's praise to the Lord God does not say she was filled of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit probably aroused Elizabeth to praise Mary that way because Mary was carrying Christ our Savior. And since Mary had heard those words of praise about her, she humbly praised God for what he was doing with her. Righteous souls always praise God for their blessings. And expressing her gratitude was the first part of her words of praise.

Mary rejoiced in her praise by describing how God is merciful to those who fear him, and how he opposes and defeats the proud, high and mighty of men. Sinners of the world oppress the humble and keep them deprived. In contrast, God takes care of the poor and deprives the rich. God does those things to their souls. For Luke later says, **"In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, and said, I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight"** (Luke 10:21).

Mary's last words of praise were especially relevant for those times, because Israel was in bondage to the Roman Empire. And the birth of their Messiah would indeed remind the Israelites of God's mercy to them. For God had prophesied many times how he would eternally bless the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were eternally blessed because the Savior of the world came from their seed. And every generation of righteous souls in the world would remember that it was in the nation of Israel where the Savior of the world came and lived as a descendant of Abraham while he was on the earth.

The birth of John

- **Now the time for Elizabeth was fulfilled for her to give birth, and she brought forth a son. And her neighbors and her kinfolk heard that the Lord magnified his mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her** (Luke 1:57-58).

Mary came to her in Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, and she remained with her for three months. That means Mary was there until the ninth month, which is the normal time of gestation. Perhaps Mary even helped with the delivery, because the passage suggests that her kinfolk did not learn about the birth until after it happened. The passage says her neighbors and kinfolk rejoiced with her, and praised the Lord for the mercy he had magnified toward her.

Elizabeth's newborn child is named

- **And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child, and they were calling it by the name of his father Zacharias. And his mother having answered, said, No, but he will be called John. And they said to her, There is no man among thy relatives who is called by this name.**
- **And they made signs to his father, whatever he wanted to call him. And having asked for a writing tablet, he wrote, saying, His name is John. And they all marveled. And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue, and he spoke, praising God (Luke 1:59-64).**

God commanded Abraham to circumcise every male child on the eighth day after birth. It was to be a special mark (personal and private of course) of their identity as a Hebrew, being sons of their forefather Abraham. For God had said to Abraham, **“And as for thee, thou shall keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between me and you.**

“And he who is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations: he who is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner that is not of thy seed. He who is born in thy house, and he who is bought with thy money, must be circumcised. And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:9-14).

Naming the child when it was circumcised was a tradition, because God commanded nothing about it. Indeed, the history of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob indicate they named their sons soon after birth. That tradition of waiting eight days to name the child probably developed because of the higher infant mortality rate in those days.

Elizabeth insisted the child be named John, because that was the name given by the agent Gabriel when he spoke to Zacharias. Zacharias confirmed the name John by writing a note to the people, and that was when God allowed him to speak again. When that happened then Zacharias was able to vocalize his praise to God for blessing them with the child. Zacharias was not bitter about being mute for so long; he knew he deserved it. And so he praised God for giving them a son.

The people wonder about John

- **And fear developed in all who dwell around them. And all these sayings were talked about in the entire hill country of Judea. And all who heard stored up in their heart, saying, What then will this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him (Luke 1:65-66).**

John having been born to the aged Zacharias and Elizabeth, plus the opening of the tongue of Zacharias when he confirmed the name John were marvels of wonder to the people.

Fear developed in all who dwelt around them because they heard about those marvels and they knew not what they meant. And as the record says, they kept in their memory what they heard, and wondered what kind of man John would be. They knew that God was treating him in a special way. For no doubt Zacharias informed all of the people what the agent Gabriel had said to him about John.

Zacharias praises God and prophesies about Christ

- **And his father Zacharias was filled of the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he came to help, and made ransom for his people. And he raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his boy David, just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us, to do mercy with our fathers, and his holy covenant to be remembered, the oath that he swore to Abraham our father, to give to us, without fear from the hand of our enemies, having been saved to serve him in piety and righteousness before him all the days of our life (Luke 1:67-75).**

Like John's mother Elizabeth, his father Zacharias was filled of the Holy Spirit when he spoke those words. And he both praised the Lord God of Israel and prophesied about how the Lord made ransom for his people and raised up a horn of salvation. And that ransom and horn of salvation was in the house of David. That means Zacharias was not speaking about John, because David was of the tribe of Judah and not Levi. He was prophesying about Jesus Christ, who was the ransom that God gave for us.

As Jesus said to his apostles, **"Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman. Just as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:25-28). Jesus the Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many. Not for all men, but for all who believe in him.

Moreover, Jesus gave us eternal salvation from our enemies, namely, the devil and his disciples. For every man with eyes to see knows how sinners hate us. And the devil hates us most of all, because we are allied with God and his Son Jesus Christ. And as Zacharias said, we have been saved to serve God with piety and righteousness before him throughout our lives.

The people who heard Zacharias no doubt interpreted his words about salvation from our enemies to mean deliverance from the hands of the Romans. For even the apostles of Jesus thought he came into the world to restore the kingdom of Israel from the Romans and then reign over it. But Zacharias was inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak those words with a much richer and deeper meaning.

Zacharias then prophesied about John

- **And thou, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High. For thou will go ahead, before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the remission of their sins, because of the bowels of mercy of our God, by which the dayspring from on high came to help us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into a way of peace (Luke 1:76-79).**

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Zacharias told how John would not be the Christ, but would be a prophet of God to go ahead of the Lord (Christ) to prepare his people for his coming. And also to give knowledge of salvation to God's people. And that salvation would be through the remission of their sins made possible by their faith in Christ. For we are all condemned by God for our sins until they are remitted by our faith in and obedience to his Son Jesus, whom, in his great mercy, God sent to become our Savior. As Zacharias said, God's mercy was shown to us by the help that Jesus gave us.

Jesus is the dayspring from on high, because he taught us the good news of salvation. Which good news is like the light of dawn driving away the darkness of the night. For mankind had been dwelling in the darkness and shadow of death because the world was ignorant of the eternal salvation that would come through Jesus Christ. And Christ truly did guide us into the way of peace, both spiritual peace on earth among all his genuine disciples, and eternal peace in the new Jerusalem of heaven.

John matures

- **And the child grew, and became strong in spirit. And he was in the desolate regions until the day of his manifestation to Israel (Luke 1:80).**

Notice how the passage focuses on the growing strength of John's spirit as he matured. The word spirit means energy, especially life energy. Becoming strong in spirit means becoming more vigorous and robust, more energetic. John became strong both in the spirit of his flesh and in his divine spirit.

The strengthening of the divine spirit of a man is manifested in his character and mentality, which is the most important part of him. Indeed, it is the only enduring part of a man, because our divine spirit is eternal. For when our body perishes our divine spirit with its mentality continues to endure, either for sonship in heaven with God or for eternal condemnation in hell with the devil and the demons.

What John was doing in the desolate regions before his manifestation to the people is not told. He may simply have been learning how to survive there, because survival in any kind of wilderness is not easy. For the wilderness would be where he would serve his ministry. It would be where the people would come to hear the preaching of that rugged and dynamic prophet of God.

The enrollment of Caesar

- **Now it came to pass in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to enroll all the world. This enrollment first occurred when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each into his personal city.**
- **And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and patriarchy of David, to enroll himself with Mary, the woman who was betrothed to him, being pregnant (Luke 2:1-5).**

When the Bible speaks of the world, it sometimes refers simply to the parts of it that were generally known. And no doubt when the passage above says that Caesar Augustus commanded all the world to be enrolled, he was referring to the entire Roman empire and not the entire globe. The enrollment may have been to create population records for taxation.

It was necessary for Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem in Judah because of his lineage. For he was of the tribe of Judah and the family of David. Bethlehem was where David was born, as shown in this passage from the book of Ruth: **“And all the people who were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. Jehovah make the woman that has come into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two built the house of Israel, and do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem. And let thy house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, of the seed which Jehovah shall give thee by this young woman.**

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and Jehovah gave her conception, and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Jehovah, who has not left thee this day without a near kinsman. And let his name be famous in Israel. And he shall be to thee a restorer of life, and a nourisher of thine old age, for thy daughter-in-law, who loves thee, who is better to thee than seven sons, has borne him.

“And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse to it. And the women, her neighbors, gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi. And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4:11-17).

By the time of Caesar’s decree, Mary was heavy with child, and the journey was no doubt very stressful for her. Nevertheless, God always cares and provides for his own, even though we must all sometimes suffer.

Jesus is born

- **And it came to pass while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to bring forth. And she brought forth her son, the firstborn, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the feed trough, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:6-7).**

There was no place for them in the inn because of the enrollment. Many had traveled there to obey Caesar’s command, and the accommodations of that small village were not suffi-

cient for all who came for the enrollment. Hence, humble people like Joseph and Mary had to use any place to shelter them. And in their case it was some kind of barn for animals (some think it was a cave). And apparently the only place the baby Jesus could be laid was in a feed trough (or manger) that was there. Of course, there is no doubt they did all they could to make things there as clean and livable as they were able during their stay.

How long they were in Bethlehem is not told, but it must have been for at least forty days, because that was the time required for Mary's purification. And after that they went to Jerusalem for the required offering of sacrifice. (I speak more about those things farther on.) Only then did the agent of God tell Joseph to flee to Egypt.

The story about the birth of Jesus tells us that the only begotten Son of God, co-creator of the entire world, sent from heaven itself, was born in a place where animals were kept, and he was laid in a feed trough. How could that be? Where was his treatment as royalty? The reason it happened that way is because God required his Son to live here as a normal man, in humble circumstances, and live without sin. God was going to prove that his Son was morally and spiritually superior to any other man. Superior indeed to any other creature (except for the Father himself), because living righteously in this troubled world is the most challenging thing anyone can face. And no doubt God did not want anyone like the devil to argue that Jesus was sinless because his life had been easier.

Shepherds are informed of his birth

- **And there were shepherds in the same region living in the fields, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And behold, an agent of the Lord stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they feared a great fear.**
- **And the agent said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be to all the people, because to you was born today in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you: Ye will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a feed trough.**
- **And suddenly there came to be with the agent a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men (Luke 2:8-14).**

Notice it was to humble shepherds that God sent an agent of the Lord with the glory of the Lord shining around them. Moreover, God allowed those humble shepherds to hear a multitude of the heavenly host praising God. It was not to the high and mighty that God gave that marvelous experience.

It was completely natural that those shepherds feared a great fear when they saw those things. However, the agent assured them not to fear. For he was sent to proclaim the birth of the Christ to them. And that was good news of great joy that would be to all the people. It was good news of great joy because Christ came to save our souls. That good news of great joy is *available* to all the people. It will not be given to all the people literally, because unrepentant sinners cannot receive it.

That agent also told those humble shepherds where to find the babe. And after his last words, that was when they saw and heard the heavenly host praising God. That heavenly host also called for peace on earth and goodwill among men. And that is a goal we should all pursue.

However, it must be remembered that peace and goodwill among men cannot happen without first defeating sin and wickedness. And the more we defeat sin and wickedness, the more peace and goodwill we will have among men on the earth. Just as crops cannot grow much when dominated by weeds, so peace and goodwill among men cannot grow much when dominated by sin and wickedness.

The shepherds go to see the child

- **And it came to pass, as the agents went away from them into heaven, that the men (the shepherds) said to each other, Let us indeed go through as far as Bethlehem, and see this declaration that has come to pass, which the Lord made known to us. And having hastened, they came and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the feed trough.**
- **And when they saw it, they informed about the declaration that was told them about this child. And all who heard it wondered about the things that were spoken to them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these proclamations, pondering in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they heard and saw, as it was told to them (Luke 2:15-20).**

The Bible does not say how many of those shepherds were there, but I suspect every one of them went to Bethlehem to see the babe. They had simply been keeping watch over their flock, and they knew that God would not allow anything to harm those sheep if they accepted the heavenly agent's invitation to see the babe.

The Bible does not say how far they were from Bethlehem or how long it would take them to go there, but it does say they went with haste. The Bible also does not say what time Jesus was born, or what time of the night the heavenly agent appeared to those shepherds. The Bible commonly omits many interesting details. They are omitted because such things are irrelevant to the message, and God did not want his holy Book to require many volumes.

The Bible also does not say how many people were present with Mary, Joseph, and the babe when he had been placed in the feed trough. Nevertheless, there was obviously room for those shepherds to see him. And they were no doubt eager to tell all about what they had seen and heard, and what the agent told them about the babe. And that caused all who heard them to wonder about what they were told. Also there is no evidence that the wise men from the east (mentioned in Matthew 2:1-12) were there at that time.

The passage says that Mary **"kept all these proclamations, pondering in her heart."** And I believe Mary was the source of Luke's information about this history of Jesus' birth. For Mary kept the memory of all those things fresh in her heart. And I believe that

much, if not most of the information that Luke reported about the births of John and Jesus came from Mary.

Those humble shepherds were obviously righteous men, because they kept glorifying and praising God for all the things they had experienced. Contrast their response about the birth of Christ with that of king Herod. Remember, Herod wanted to slay the child. And he even commanded all of the young boys in and around Bethlehem to be killed, in the hope that Christ would be included (see Matthew 2 for that terrible story).

Jesus is circumcised

- **And when eight days were fulfilled to circumcise him, that his name was called JESUS, the one called by the agent before he was conceived in the belly. And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, (just as it is written in a law of the Lord that every male that opens a womb will be called holy to the Lord), and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in a law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Luke 2:21-24).**

As with John the immerser, Jesus was also officially named when he was circumcised. Remember however, naming their sons at circumcision was a tradition, not a command of God. Nevertheless, it would have been foolish and meaningless for them to violate that tradition. There is nothing wrong with following those kinds of traditions.

The command about the days of purification, however, was part of the law of Moses. Here is what the law says about it: **“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives seed, and bears a man-child, then she shall be unclean seven days, as in the days of the impurity of her sickness [menstruation] she shall be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying thirty-three days. She shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.**

“But if she bears a maid-child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying sixty-six days.” (Leviticus 12:2-5).

And here is the remaining part of that law, which gives the commands about offering a sacrifice: **“And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle-dove, for a sin offering, to the door of the tent of meeting, to the priest. And he shall offer it before Jehovah, and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the fountain of her blood. This is the law for her who bears, whether a male or a female.**

“And if her means are not sufficient for a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean” (Leviticus 12:6-8).

Notice that since Mary offered a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons she was following the command for mothers whose means were not sufficient for a lamb. Her offering is proof that Joseph and Mary were poor people. And it also indicates the wise men from the east had not yet come to them. For remember, they gave the child **“gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh”** (Matthew 2:11). For if Joseph had possessed those things he could easily have afforded a lamb for Mary’s offering. And there is no doubt that God provided those gifts through the hands of the wise men to help Joseph provide for the child and his mother Mary.

I suspect Joseph had found some kind of satisfactory place to dwell in Bethlehem, and they left their traveling baggage there while they took the small journey to Jerusalem to make the offering. It was only about six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Therefore, they could have easily made the round trip in one day.

The divine testimony of Simeon

- **And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the encouragement of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was divinely revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he would not see death before he would see the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the Spirit into the temple.**
- **And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, for them to do according to the custom of the law about him, he also received it into his arms, and praised God, and said, Now dismiss thy bondman in peace, Master, according to thy word, because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou prepared toward the face of all the peoples: a light for enlightenment of Gentiles, and glory of thy people Israel (Luke 2:25-32).**

That visit by Simeon served at least two purposes. It was the fulfillment of the promise by the Holy Spirit that Simeon would live to see the Christ of the Lord. And it also provided testimony that Jesus was the Christ of the Lord, testimony that Simeon proclaimed to Jesus’ parents in the temple. And no doubt there were other witnesses that heard his testimony.

That testimony told how Jesus was the salvation of God, the salvation he has provided to all who will believe in and obey his Son Jesus Christ. God had prepared for this time of salvation for mankind since the beginning. Indeed, even before the beginning, because God knew that man would need a Savior. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Notice how Simeon even prophesied that Christ would be a blessing to the Gentiles, as well as bring glory to God’s people Israel. Christ is a blessing to Gentiles because they can also become God’s people. And Christ brought glory to Israel, because it was there that he served his ministry and established the kingdom of God on the earth, the church.

Part of Simeon’s testimony about Christ was his praise to God and his expression of thankfulness to him. Simeon was described as a righteous and devout man. And every righteous and devote man will praise God and express thanks to him whenever there are

opportune times. Simeon must have been very old, too old to see the maturity of Jesus. Therefore, he told God that he was then ready to be dismissed of his life in this world.

The passage above refers to the baby Jesus as “it.” He is referred to that way because the Greek pronoun for him in that passage is in the neuter gender. That was commonly done when referring to young children. I could have followed all the other translations and used the masculine pronoun. However, I decided it would be more informative to translate the word literally, and let the reader decide why the language reads that way.

Simeon prophesied about Jesus

- **And Joseph and his mother were marveling at the things being spoken about him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this man is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign being repudiated (and also of thee, a sword will pierce through thine own soul), so that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:33-35).**

Joseph and Mary marveled because they were poor and humble people with nothing about them and their lives that would indicate such greatness in that baby. Simeon probably spoke those words to Mary because she would live to see the crucifixion of Jesus. A sword piercing through her own soul probably symbolized seeing his crucifixion. Joseph apparently died sometime before Jesus began his ministry, and did not live to see it.

The falling and the rising of many in Israel no doubt refers to their eternal destiny. For Jesus gave the hope of life in heaven for all who followed him, and he warned of the condemnation of all who did not. Also Jesus was the sign being repudiated. He was the sign from God first sent to the people of Israel and then later to all people. He was a sign of what God is like and how he wants us to live, but that sign was repudiated.

The Jews repudiated Jesus and his teachings, and even crucified him. And their acceptance or repudiation of Jesus revealed the thought of their hearts. Meaning it revealed the character of their hearts, whether they were good or evil. And we too can see the character of people's hearts by how they respond to Christ. Of course, there are many different kinds of responses to him, but each individual's acceptance or repudiation of him and his teachings indicates his worthiness or unworthiness of eternal salvation.

Anna the prophetess

- **And there was Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (being advanced in many days, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and this woman was a widow to eighty-four years), who did not depart from the temple, serving with fastings and supplications night and day. And having stood near at that same hour, she acknowledged the Lord, and spoke about him to all those who were awaiting redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).**

There have been a few women prophets mentioned in both the Old Testament and the New Testament records. However, those women were a small minority, and they wrote nothing

that is contained in the Bible. Anna was probably chosen by the Lord to be a prophetess because she was so devoted to her service in the temple. Although there were women prophets in the Old Testament, no woman was ever a priest. Therefore, she probably served as a humble servant to the priests to perform other tasks for them.

The text says that she served with fastings and supplications night and day. She was indeed devoted to God and his temple, which is also called the house of God. The text does not say how long Anna had been living and serving in the temple. It does say she became a widow after having been married seven years.

There are several possibilities. If she had children she could have spent most of her life with them and her grandchildren, only coming to the temple in her old age. However, the text suggests that she came to live and serve in the temple soon after she became a widow. That would mean she had been there most of her life if she had married at the normal age for women. Of course, such conjectures are endless, and they are all trivial. It is sad to see how much labor is expended by modern theologians on such things, while they neglect what the word of God is really teaching.

As Simeon had done, Anna also came to the child, testified that he was the Lord, and prophesied about him. Notice how the passage says that she **“spoke about him to all those who were awaiting redemption in Jerusalem.”** God does not want us to waste our time speaking to men who have no interest in God and his will for us. We are to **“shake the dust from our feet”** (see Luke 9:5) toward such disinterested souls.

The childhood of Jesus

- **And when they completed all things according to the law of Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And the grace of God was upon him** (Luke 2:39-40).

Remember, I believe they first returned to Bethlehem before departing for Nazareth. Also remember, Matthew says Joseph was commanded by an agent from God to flee to Egypt. Luke simply omitted that part of the history, as well as having omitted the part about the visit of the wise men from the east. Some commentators have suggested that Joseph first returned to Nazareth, and that is where the agent appeared and told him to flee to Egypt. However, that would have greatly lengthened their travel time. Therefore, I believe it is more probably that Luke simply omitted the story about fleeing to Egypt.

Although Jesus was the Son of God and was conceived miraculously, he was still in a body of flesh. It was necessary for him to be born as an ignorant and helpless baby, then grow, learn, and mature like any normal man. And as he did he **“became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And the grace of God was upon him.”** Although the Greek says “upon it” in that passage, in this case I chose to translate the word to him, as the other translators have it. Otherwise, the text would be too confusing to those who read the English translation. There are times when such changes are necessary, but I sought to limit them as much as I could.

God wants each one of us to grow, become strong in spirit and filled with wisdom. And when we live as he would have us, then his grace will be upon us. Remember, the word

spirit means energy, especially life energy. And becoming strong in spirit means being vigorous and dynamic in our living. Weakness in spirit means being slothful and unambitious. Having strength in spirit and wisdom enables us to live righteously and productively, unless that spirit becomes corrupted.

The child Jesus knew he was God's Son

- **And his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he became twelve years old, them having gone up according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, during their return the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem.**
- **And Joseph and his mother did not know it, but, having supposed him to be in the caravan, they went a day's journey. And they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintances. And not having found him, they turned back to Jerusalem, seeking him.**
- **And it came to pass after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and questioning them. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him they were amazed.**
- **And his mother said to him, Child, why did thou this way to us? Behold, thy father and I were seeking thee sorrowing. And he said to them, Why is it that ye were seeking me? Had ye not known that I must be among the things of my Father? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them (Luke 2:41-50).**

Very early in his childhood Jesus knew he was the Son of God. How he knew is another mystery. The Bible record tells us there were times when God spoke with him directly. Perhaps that is how he came to know, because he was not born with that knowledge. He was born in a normal body of flesh, and had to mature and learn just like every other man.

Another possibility is that his mother Mary told him about how the heavenly agent spoke with her about his birth and who he was, and that Joseph was not his biological father. That kind of information would have been difficult for a young child to understand. But by the time he was twelve years old he could have understood it. And he could have integrated that knowledge in his mind such that he began to act toward God as a son would act toward his father.

Regardless of how he learned of it, when Jesus was twelve years old the record says he already knew he was the Son of God. That is why he said to his Father and mother, **“Had ye not known that I must be among the things of my Father?”**

And I think a lesson for us is that when we put on Christ as a disciple, and become a son of God for eternity, we should also think of God as our Father in the same kind of way Jesus did. Not that we are a son the way Jesus is, because he is the only begotten Son of God. Yet we should also seek to be among the things of our heavenly Father. And those things

now are the congregations of Christ and the words of his Holy Bible. We should be attracted to them the way the young Jesus was attracted to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus was properly subordinate

- **And he went down with them [his father and his mother], and came to Nazareth, and was being subordinate to them. And his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and men** (Luke 2:51-52).

There are three things I want to say about that passage. First, notice how the text says that Jesus was being subordinate to his father and his mother. He was the only begotten Son of God, Lord of heaven and earth. Yet while he was under their authority he was subordinate to them. Indeed, Paul said of all children, **“But I say the heir, for as long a time as he is a child, differs nothing from a bondman though he is lord of all. Instead he is under stewards and managers until the time appointed from the father”** (Galatians 4:1-2). And until Jesus became a man he was under the stewardship of his father and his mother. When it was that Jesus was recognized as a man independent of his parents is not told.

Jesus gave us an example of humbling ourselves and being subordinate and obedient to those who have authority over us. As Paul said, **“Indeed have this way to think in you, that also was in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God something to seize and hold. But he emptied himself, having taken a form of a bondman, having become in a likeness of men. And having been found in a form like a man, he lowered himself, having become obedient until death, even of death from a cross”** (Philippians 2:5-8).

And even when there is no legal authority, whenever it is right in God’s sight we should submit ourselves. For example, although our sinful rulers have robbed husbands of their God given authority over their wives, nevertheless Christian wives should submit themselves willfully.

The second thing I will mention about that passage concerns what it says about his mother keeping those sayings in her heart. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was very much in the background of his life after he began his ministry. Yet I am convinced that she performed a vital service for those who later wrote the biographies of him. I believe she shared those memories, that she kept in her heart, with those authors so they could write an accurate history of him, especially for this biography written by Luke. Nevertheless, that is only a conjecture, because we have no record of specifically from whom those authors obtained any of their biographical information about Jesus besides themselves.

Luke did state at the beginning of this biography of Jesus that he was giving **“a narration about the deeds that have been brought to fullness among us, just as they delivered them to us, who became from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word ...”** (Luke 1:1-2). It was from the **“eyewitnesses and servants of the word”** that Luke obtained his knowledge about the life of Jesus. And that was no doubt true of the other biographers of him.

Also remember, the Bible never refers to Mary as “the virgin Mary.” Nor does the Bible ever refer to her as “the mother of God.” Those are perverse expressions used by the

Roman Catholic Church to encourage their followers to worship her. Mary was a normal woman, although a very righteous one. And she was chosen to become the mother of Jesus who was the Son of God. She was the mother of his physical body only, not of his spirit. Mary miraculously conceived so that Jesus could be born of a virgin to fulfill that prophecy about him (see Isaiah 7:14). However, she later conceived other children the normal way (see Matthew 13:55-56). She did not remain a virgin.

The third thing I will mention is how Jesus increased in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men. Jesus used his childhood very efficiently to increase his wisdom. For Jesus was not born with it, but he had to acquire much of his knowledge and understanding just like every other man. Of course, there is no doubt that God was also giving him special knowledge and understanding. For Paul said of himself, **“For I make known to you, brothers, the good news that was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it was through revelation of Jesus Christ”** (Galatians 1:11-12).

When the text says Jesus increased in favor with men, that means they were pleased with how he was developing and becoming more useful. Men did not begin to turn away from him until he began his ministry and called upon them to repent of their sins.

John receives the word of God

- **Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip being tetrarch of the region belonging to Ituraea, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias being tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to be in John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness** (Luke 3:1-2).

That information helps historians date the time of these things. For John was the first har-binger of the Messiah Jesus Christ. Regarding the high priesthood, remember they were required to be of the lineage of Aaron. And by that time Aaron had many descendants, because Aaron lived about fifteen hundred years before Christ. And since only one man could serve as the high priest at any one time, then there was of necessity a selection process. How that was done is not told, because the law of Moses gave no instructions for it.

When the passage says that the word of God came to be in John, that means he was divinely inspired. Remember, the apostle Paul said about his own preaching, **“For I make known to you, brothers, the good news that was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it was through revelation of Jesus Christ”** (Galatians 1:11-12). And the word of God also came to John the immerser through revelation.

During the time of Christ the land of Israel consisted of Judea to the south, Galilee to the north, and Samaria in between. The regions of Ituraea, Trachonitis, and Abilene were located Northeast of Galilee. Tiberius Caesar was head of the Roman Empire. Pontius Pilate is the governor who ordered Jesus crucified, having been forced by the rulers of the Jews. Herod is the man who had John the immerser beheaded. That was a result of John criticizing Herod for having married his brother Philip’s wife. Lysanias is only mentioned

here in the Bible. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests who persecuted Jesus and his apostles.

John begins to preach

- **And he came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching an immersion of repentance for remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, which says, The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low. And the crooked things will be into straight and the rough into smooth ways. And all flesh will see the salvation of God (Luke 3:3-6).**

That prophecy from Isaiah says, “**The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places smooth. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it**” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God sent John to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Christ. And that preparation included repentance, which meant turning away from sins. The valleys being filled and the mountains and hills being brought low symbolize the removal of the obstacles in the hearts of the people to receive the good news of Christ. And the crooked things being straightened and the rough made smooth symbolize the hearts of the people rejecting sin for righteousness, the righteousness of the kingdom of God that came through Christ. Crookedness commonly symbolizes evil behavior.

All flesh seeing the salvation of God means that the good news of salvation brought by Christ was given to all of mankind. Virtually all men are now able to know about it, and it is the decision of every man to choose it.

John rebukes the multitudes

- **He said therefore to the multitudes who went out to be immersed by him, Ye offspring of vipers, who showed you to flee from the coming wrath? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say within yourselves, We have a father, Abraham. For I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore not making good fruit is cut down, and cast into fire (Luke 3:7-9).**

What John meant by the coming wrath was probably the day of judgment at the end of the world. And only by repentance can we avoid God’s eternal condemnation of us. After rebuking the multitudes severely by calling them offspring of vipers, he told them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. And that means living righteously in the sight of God. And part of living righteously is being productive of good things, whatever they might be.

The Jews were a very proud people. They boasted that they were children of Abraham, which means they were members of God's chosen people. John belittled that boast by telling them God could make the stones on the ground become children of Abraham. It is not our flesh that makes us children of God, but the character of our spirits.

John also warned them that the time of punishment was near—the axe being laid at the root of the trees. And every person (symbolized by the trees) not making good fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire, the lake of fire that burns forever (see Revelation 20:14).

The axe being laid at the root of the trees is relevant for each one of us. For as soon as we commit our first sin as a child, we are in danger of eternal condemnation. And since even the longest life in this world is relatively short, that means our eternal condemnation is imminent. It is imminent unless we repent and bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. And that repentance now includes our full commitment to Jesus Christ.

The people ask what to do

- **And the crowds questioned him, saying, What then shall we do? And having answered, he says to them, He who has two coats, let him share with him not having, and he who has food, let him do likewise.**
- **And tax collectors also came to be immersed, and they said to him, Teacher, what should we do? And he said to them, Collect not one thing more than from what has been appointed for you.**
- **And men who were soldiers also questioned him, saying, And we, what should we do? And he said to them, Do violence to no man, nor accuse falsely, and be content with your wages (Luke 3:10-14).**

Although John called the people offspring of vipers, they did not storm away or attack him in anger, but they humbly asked him what they should do. Three years later, after the establishment of the church, when Stephen accused the rulers of the Jews of being **“stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears”** (Acts 7:51), they became furious and stoned him to death. The multitude of people who came to John were of a much better spirit, and they humbly hearkened to him.

In response to the question from the crowds, John told them to share their abundance with those in need (the worthy among them). The Bible contains many warnings about becoming rich, and for most men, becoming rich requires hoarding their surpluses.

In response to the question from the tax collectors, John told them not to collect more than what they were assigned to collect. They were no doubt tempted to collect more and keep the extra for themselves, because the accounting methods in those days were primitive.

In response to the question from the soldiers, John told them to do no violence or accuse falsely. Law men have much power and authority to use force. And it is tempting for them to abuse that right. Hence, John warned them against it. He also told them to be content with their wages. With the power and authority the soldiers had, they could also abuse it

by taking what they had no right to take. That is a common temptation even now for soldiers and policemen.

The advice John gave to the people who asked him what they should do, was for them to live righteously. For those answers he gave were but a sample of how we should live righteously, regardless of our role and position in life. And each one of those examples complies with the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. For the apostle Paul said, **“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Galatians 5:14).

John speaks about the Christ

- **And as the people were expectant, and all pondering in their hearts about John, if perhaps he was the Christ, John responded, saying to them all, I indeed immerse you in water, but a man mightier than I comes, of whom I am not worthy to unloose the strap of his shoes.**
- **He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and fire, whose winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor, and will gather the wheat into his storehouse, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire** (Luke 3:15-17).

The people of Israel had been anticipating the coming of the Christ of God (the Messiah) for many years. And it was understandable that they would wonder if John was the Christ. John knew what they were pondering in their hearts, and so he assured them he was not the Christ. Although he was immersing them in water for the remission of their sins, he told them of the greater man who was coming. And he humbly confessed that the man who was coming was mightier than he. He even said that he was not worthy to unloose the strap of his shoes.

John said that man would immerse them in the Holy Spirit and fire. Every disciple of Christ is immersed in the Holy Spirit when he becomes one of Jesus' disciples. For Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16).

And being immersed in fire symbolizes the trials and tribulations that we must endure to become a son of God for eternity. For Peter said we must be proven by fire: **“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot us again according to his abundant mercy for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for an inheritance imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heavens for you, men being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

“In which ye greatly rejoice, although made sorrowful in various trials. Since it is now necessary for a little while, so that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, and though proven by fire, may be found for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ” (First Peter 1:3-7). Our faith is proven by fire.

John used that allegory of threshing wheat to symbolize how Jesus is testing our souls to determine who is worthy of salvation and who deserves eternal condemnation in Hell, which is the lake of fire that burns forever. That final separation will occur at the day of judgment when this world is over. Jesus also told a parable about separating wheat from tares, which gives the same lesson (see Matthew 13:24-30).

John preached the good news

- **Indeed therefore, also exhorting the people with many other things, he preached the good news** (Luke 3:18).

Part of the good news that John preached was that through repentance and immersion in water we could have remission of our sins. And part of the good news was the coming of the kingdom of God. For Matthew records these words of exhortation from John: **“Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached”** (Matthew 3:2). And those are truly good news because they give us the hope of eternal life with God in heaven.

Herod imprisons John

- **But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him about Herodias his brother's wife, and about all of which evil things Herod had done, also added this to them all, he even locked up John in prison** (Luke 3:19-20).

This particular Herod was not the man who commanded to kill all of the baby boys in and around Bethlehem (as told in Matthew 2:16); he was his son. Nevertheless, this Herod was also a very sinful man who did many evil things. However, it was Herodias who provoked Herod to oppress John, because John rebuked Herod for not having the right to marry Herodias. That story is told in Matthew 14 and Mark 6.

The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus

- **Now it came to pass, during the immersion of all the people, Jesus also having been immersed and praying, for the heaven to be opened, and the Holy Spirit to descend in a bodily form as a dove upon him, and a voice to occur out of heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son. In thee I am well pleased** (Luke 3:21-22).

Notice how the Spirit of God did not appear as a mighty power when he spoke, but instead he appeared as a gentle dove. When the Spirit of God spoke that way it contrasted greatly from the time God spoke to the people of Israel from mount Sinai. For the book of Exodus says, **“And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die”** (Exodus 20:18-19).

Why did God show himself so gentle during the time of Jesus? Part of the reason was to fulfill prophecy from Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4) about Jesus. Matthew quoted that prophecy, when he said, **“And ... Jesus withdrew from there, and many multitudes followed him,**

and he healed them all. And he chided them so that they would not make him known, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which says, Behold, my Boy whom I chose, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased.

“I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor will he shout, nor will any man hear his voice in the thoroughfares. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoldering flax he will not quench, until he sends forth justice for victory. And in his name Gentiles will hope” (Matthew 12:15-21).

God showed himself gentle through his Son Jesus, who is also called the Lamb of God. God has both a gentle side and a fierce side. His gentle side is for the sheep of God that Jesus came to save. For Jesus said to the Jews who were rejecting him, **“But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:26-28). I say much more to say about those things in my commentary.

A genealogy of Jesus

- **And Jesus himself was beginning to be about thirty years old, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Janna, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Joseph, the son of Joda, the son of Joannan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Jose, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God** (Luke 3:23-38).

That is the longest sentence in the Bible, and consists of 319 words. That genealogy differs somewhat from Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. The two genealogies are identical from Abraham to David. This genealogy by Luke continues from Abraham back to Adam, while Matthew omits that part of the genealogy.

The main difference between the two genealogies is from David to Joseph the husband of Mary. Luke continues from David to his son Solomon, while Matthew continues from

David to his son Nathan. Moreover, in Luke there are forty names listed between David and Joseph the husband of Mary, while in Matthew there are only twenty-five names mentioned, and most of them are different from the ones in Luke. Regarding names, it should be remembered that many men named in the Bible had the same name as other men. Indeed, there were 28 different men with the name Azariah that are mentioned in the Bible.

Why the difference in the genealogies between David and Joseph the husband of Mary is not explained. Matthew says that Joseph the husband of Mary was the son of Jacob and the grandson of Matthat, while Luke says he was the son of Heli and the grandson of Matthan. Both of those names, Matthat and Matthan may refer to the same man. However, from that point the listings are very different until David.

Most people claim the genealogy in Luke is of Mary his mother. However, the Bible never lists the genealogy of women. Moreover, remember Mary was a Levite, a kinswoman of Elizabeth the Levite. Mary was not a descendant of David.

A better solution is simply that Joseph the husband of Mary was both the son of Jacob and the son of Heli. One of those men could have been his biological father, while the other one was his later stepfather. For if Joseph's biological father died while he was a child, and his widowed mother married again, then he could legally have had two fathers. Since the law of Moses required the brother of a man to marry his widow, that would normally have made no difference in the genealogy. However, if Joseph's biological father was an only son, then any man his widowed mother married would not have had the same genealogy.

And that would explain the differences in the two genealogies from Joseph to David. One of the biographers could have chosen to give the genealogy from Joseph's biological father, while the other biographer chose to give the genealogy from Joseph's later stepfather. Remember, although Joseph was the legal father of Jesus, he was not his biological father. Jesus was born of a virgin and consequently had no biological father.

There is another important matter about both of the biographies. Only eight generations are listed between Judah the son of Jacob and Jesse the father of David. Yet there were about a thousand years between Judah and Jesse. It is therefore obvious that many names were omitted for some reason. When the genealogy says one man was the son of another man, it could mean he was his son many generations removed. Or when it says one man begot another man, it could mean the same things as saying Abraham begot David, who was born many generations removed.

The Holy Spirit of God decided the two genealogies as listed are sufficient. Perhaps they were given to show us that genealogies of fathers of either legal lineage or biological lineage are equally acceptable. Nevertheless, it is foolish for us to fret about trivial things that may not be clear. For Paul said, **"But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legalistic fightings, for they are useless and vain"** (Titus 3:9).

Notice in Luke's biography that Adam was called the son of God. When Jesus was upon the earth men emphasized his humanity and diminished his divinity. In the same way men emphasize our humanity and diminish our divinity. For the holy scriptures say that we are sons of God, just as Jesus was a son of God. Indeed, Jesus called his disciples brothers.

And he was not referring to any relationship of our flesh. We are spiritual brothers to the only begotten Son of God.

Every man is an offspring of God (see Acts 17:28-29), which means we are born sons of God. However, when we sin we lose that sonship. And it is only through our faith and obedience to Jesus Christ that we can be adopted to become sons of God again. And that makes us brothers of Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God. For the apostle John said, **“Every man who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten from God, and every man who loves him who begot, also loves him who has been begotten from him”** (First John 5:1).

Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness

- **And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted forty days by the devil** (Luke 4:1-2).

Luke here says that Jesus was tempted forty days by the devil. Both Matthew and Luke describe three of those temptations. However, if Jesus was tempted forty days, then he was probably tempted by more than just the three mentioned by the biographers. Indeed, he may even have been tempted during each one of those forty days. On the other hand, his forty days being tempted may refer to his forty days of fasting (see the next passage). Nevertheless, it is not important for us to know such trivial details. What we have in the Bible record is sufficient for us.

Notice how the passage says that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. In the example of prayer that Jesus gave his disciples, he said, **“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...”** (Matthew 6:13). And Jesus said to his apostles on the night of his betrayal, **“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (Matthew 26:41). Why then would the Spirit of God lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? The reason is that Jesus needed to be tested severely so that nobody could claim he was sinless only because he was not tempted sufficiently.

In order to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, and to prove that sin is not inevitable, it was necessary for Jesus to experience many temptations without ever sinning.

The devil tempts Jesus to create bread from stones

- **And he ate nothing in those days, and when they were ended, afterward he was hungry. And the devil said to him, If thou are the Son of God, speak to this stone that it may become bread. And Jesus answered, saying to him, It is written, Man will not live on bread alone, but on every saying of God** (Luke 4:2-4).

About fasting, how long a man can fast without harming his body varies depending upon many things, including the man's age and his normal weight. Jesus probably fasted as long as he could without risk of permanent harm to his body.

In that wilderness the devil subjected Jesus to three temptations. The first one involved hunger. After fasting forty days and forty nights, the record says that Jesus was hungry. Hunger begins the first day of fasting, and it increases with food deprivation until it reaches a maximum, which then remains high until satisfied. And there is no doubt Jesus was at the maximum level of hunger. And even though Jesus had the power to satisfy it supernaturally, he would not use that power because of his obedience to God.

Every one of us is subject to temptations to indulge the lusts of our flesh. And we sin if we attempt to satisfy them wrongfully. The desire of a man to bed with his wife is no more a sin than to want to eat his own food. Lust is wanting something sinfully, such as to bed with another man's wife or to rob food. And to prove our worthiness to be sons of God for eternity we must follow the path of our Lord Jesus Christ and resist the lusts of our flesh, and every other temptation of the devil.

The devil is also called "he who tempts." The first mention of the devil in the Bible is at the beginning when, in the form of a serpent, he tempted the woman Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden. The devil tempts us to sin for at least two reasons. One reason is because he is the great adversary of God, and he wants allies to join him in opposing God. The second reason is because he hates us and wants our souls destroyed. He hates us because we have the potential to become sons of God for eternity, but he does not.

How the devil spoke to Jesus is not told. From what is said about all of the temptations it seems most probably that the spirit of the devil spoke to Jesus in his thoughts, and not in any kind of physical presence. Satan is indeed able to enter into the thoughts of men. For example, Luke says, **"And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And having departed, he conversed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him to them"** (Luke 22:3-4). Judas allowed Satan to manipulate him to betray Jesus, but Jesus resisted and rejected the devil's temptations. And whenever evil thoughts enter into our minds we too should resist and reject them.

Jesus resisted that temptation of the devil by quoting an appropriate passage of scripture. In this case it was from the words of Moses: **"... man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Jehovah"** (Deuteronomy 8:3). We all consist of a body of flesh and an eternal spirit. And it is wrong and foolish to live for our flesh only. Yet the world is filled with people who do just that. And it puts them on the path to the death of their spirit, a living death in the fires of hell. To save our eternal spirit we must live by the word of God, which guides us on the path to live righteously.

The devil tempts Jesus to worship him

- **And having brought him onto a high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, I will give to thee all this authority, and the glory of them, because it has been delivered to me, and to whomever I want I give it.**

- **If therefore thou wilt worship before me, it will all be thine. And having answered, Jesus said to him, Go thee behind me, Satan. It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Luke 4:5-8).**

Various explanations have been offered to explain how Satan could show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. However, I believe that passage is merely a figurative description of such a sight. There is and never has been such a mountain where that could be done. Even creating an exceedingly high mountain by supernatural power could not allow Jesus to see all those kingdoms with his eyes. Consequently, I believe that description is evidence that the devil tempted Jesus in his thoughts. The exceedingly high mountain symbolized creating images in the mind of Jesus where he could imagine seeing all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

Nevertheless, Satan did have the actual ability to give Jesus **“all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.”** For Jesus himself spoke of the devil as the ruler of the world. For example, during the last supper, he said to his apostles, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31).

God gave the world to mankind when he first created it. As the psalmist said, **“The heavens are the heavens of Jehovah, but the earth he has given to the sons of men”** (Psalm 115:16). However, men have delivered the kingdoms of the world to the devil, because they have chosen him and his ways. God has allowed mankind to deliver the kingdoms of the world to the devil, because God is the ultimate ruler. For example, the prophet Daniel said, **“... the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will”** (Daniel 4:25).

Nevertheless, God has allowed mankind to deliver the kingdoms of the world to the devil, not because he deserves them, but because men have chosen the devil to rule over them instead of God. God allowed Hitler to rule over the German people because they chose him to be their lord and master instead of Jesus Christ. And the world is going to end much worse than Germany did under Hitler.

If Jesus had worshiped the devil, I have no doubt he would have become emperor of the Roman empire. And with that power he would have been able to extend the conquest of Rome over every other kingdom, regardless of how remote it was. Jesus could have been the greatest emperor the world has ever known.

However, if Jesus had sinned against God that way, he would have died like every other man. And he and all of mankind would have been condemned to be cast into hell with the devil and the demons. We should all thank God that Jesus rejected all of the temptations of the devil. That is how he earned the right to redeem us from condemnation in hell with the devil and the demons, and enabled us to become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

As with the temptation about bread, Jesus rebuffed the devil by quoting another passage of scripture from Moses: **“Thou shalt fear Jehovah thy God, and him thou shalt serve, and shall swear by his name”** (Deuteronomy 6:13). (I speak more about swearing in my commentary of Matthew 5:33-37.)

The best way to defeat the temptations of the devil is to continually rely upon the word of God. That is the reason the devil and his disciples continually strive to destroy the Bible

and people's faith in it. For wherever the word of God works in the hearts of men, there will be truth and righteousness.

The devil tempts Jesus to challenge God

- **And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and he said to him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down from here, for it is written, He will give his angels orders about thee, to protect thee, and, They will take thee up on their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. And having answered, Jesus said to him, It is said, Thou shalt not challenge the Lord thy God (Luke 4:9-12).**

That temptation could be considered an example of the sin of what John called the pride of life (see First John 2:16). For Jesus would have had many spectators to see him do it. And if he had miraculously survived it would have immediately elevated him to greatness in their eyes. However, as with the devil's temptation of Eve, I have no doubt Jesus would have perished had he tried it. For, as Jesus said in John's biography of him, the devil **"is a liar and the father of it"** (John 8:44).

As with seeing all the kingdoms of the world, I do not believe the devil literally stood Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple. Remember, Jesus was in the wilderness, having fasted forty days. What probably happened is that the devil used Jesus' memories of the temple to give him some kind of mental imagery about being on the pinnacle.

No doubt that is what the devil did when he tempted Judas to betray Jesus. He tempted Judas by first giving him a mental image of going to the rulers of the Jews with his offer. And Judas used those thoughts in his heart to actually go and offer to betray Jesus. In contrast, Jesus resisted and rejected the thought of casting himself from the pinnacle of the temple. And he again quoted a passage of scripture from Moses to oppose that temptation: **"Ye shall not challenge Jehovah your God ..."** (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Jesus had opposed the devil's first temptation by quoting words from the Bible. So this time the devil quoted a passage from the Bible to tempt him. Beware lest disciples of the devil tempt you to sin by misapplying the words of the Bible to mislead you. What the devil quoted is a passage of scripture from the psalms: **"For thou, O Jehovah, art my refuge! Thou have made the Most High thy habitation. There shall no evil befall thee, nor shall any plague come near thy tent, for he will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone"** (Psalm 91:9-12). But unlike Jesus' opposition to sin, the devil quoted that scripture to tempt Jesus to sin.

God's promise to protect his Son Jesus Christ that way was literal. And the reason is because Jesus never sinned to be captured to the law of sin. Paul wrote about that law when he said, **"For I do not do good that I want, instead, wrong that I do not want, this I do. But if I do this that I do not want, I no longer perform it, but sin dwelling in me. Consequently I find the law in my wanting to do good, that evil is present in me."**

"For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body-parts, warring against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my body-parts. I am a wretched man. Who will rescue me out

of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I of myself in the mind indeed serve a law of God, but in the flesh a law of sin” (Romans 7:19-25).

It is a sin to injure ourselves by dashing our foot against a stone. Yet, as Paul said of himself, none of us is able to prevent such things. We do not want to do them. But we do them anyway, because we have all been captured in the law of sin. And that happens when we first sin, just as happened to Adam when he sinned. But Jesus never sinned. Therefore, he was never subject to the law of sin. Consequently, God protected him from doing any kind of wrong that is inadvertent, any kind of foolish “mistake” in his behavior. I speak much more about these things in the chapter “The Sin of Adam” in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Deliberately taking any kind of foolish or unnecessary risk is challenging God. Dangerous thrill seeking is challenging God, although the world calls it daredevilry. Gambling is also challenging God, because Solomon said, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah”** (Proverbs 16:33). God determines the outcome of everything that happens, including things we think are the result of chance only. Therefore, gamblers are challenging God to cause them to win, to profit from what they do not deserve. I also speak more about those things in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

There is only one difference between the descriptions in Luke and Matthew. The temptation about all the kingdoms of the world was given third in Matthew instead of second as in Luke. Such a difference is so trivial it is hardly worth mentioning. I only mention it to help prepare you against the scoffers who use such trivial things to challenge your faith. Scoffers never learn the truth. For Solomon said, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding”** (Proverbs 14:6). A man who is a scoffer can only start learning when he repents and genuinely begins looking for the truth.

The devil withdrew until a time

- **And when the devil ended every temptation, he withdrew from him until a time** (Luke 4:13).

Notice how the passage says the devil withdrew from Jesus after he resisted his every temptation. That is characteristic of the devil, because James said, **“Be subordinate therefore to God, but resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). I have experienced many times when I rebuffed someone tempting me, and the result was always to have them walk away from me. Tempters hate being rebuffed. The times the devil chooses to tempt us are when we are more vulnerable.

Jesus begins his ministry

- **And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. And a report went out about him through the entire region around. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all** (Luke 4:14-15).

Jesus went from the wilderness to Galilee and taught in their synagogues. And that caused the positive report about him to go throughout the region, because they all glorified him. Notice how the passage says that Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit. Having fasted forty days and forty nights would have so weakened him that he would normally have been unable to go out of the wilderness under his own power. Therefore, God empowered him lest he perish there.

Jesus enters his hometown synagogue

- **And he came to Nazareth, where he was brought up. And according to that which was customary to him, he entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read (Luke 4:16).**

That record in Luke says it was customary for Jesus to enter into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stand up to read. That particular synagogue was where Jesus lived as a carpenter before he began his ministry. And apparently it was customary for him to read there because he was literate.

Remember, most people were illiterate in those days. Indeed, the book of Acts says that both Peter and John were illiterate. That is mentioned when the book tells of a time they were being tried by the rulers of the Jews: **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they are illiterate and uneducated men, they marveled. And they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13).

Meeting in synagogues was customary, but it was never commanded in the law of Moses. Nevertheless, it was a good custom. And our custom of meeting in congregations on the first day of the week is also a good custom, although it too was never commanded by God.

Jesus reads where Isaiah prophesied about him

- **And the book of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. And having opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to send forth in deliverance those who have been broken, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.**
- **And having closed the book, having given it back to the attendant, he sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were focused on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:17-21).**

What Jesus quoted in the book of Isaiah is from this passage: **“The Spirit of the lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and the opening of bonds to those who are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to**

them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

That quotation from Isaiah was a marvelous description of the many things the Messiah would do. Remember this passage about John the immerser’s inquiry of Jesus: **“Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, having sent two of his disciples, he said to him, Are thou he who comes, or do we look for another man? And having answered, Jesus said to them, After going, report to John the things that ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor are proclaimed good news” (Matthew 11:2-5).** Those were the very things that Isaiah had prophesied about the Christ.

What is meant by the acceptable year of the Lord is not clear. Since the passage says that he who had the Spirit of the Lord upon him was sent to do all those wonderful things, then the specific year that the Lord sent him must be the acceptable year of the Lord. And it was that year when Jesus began his ministry to do all those wonderful things, and to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. Therefore, he could say to them, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.”** It was truly the acceptable year of the Lord.

Prophets and their fatherlands

- **And all witnessed to him, and wondered at the words of grace that proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is this not the son of Joseph? And he said to them, Ye will doubtless say to me this proverb: Physician, heal thyself. How many things we heard that happened at Capernaum, do also here in thy fatherland. And he said, Truly I say to you, that not one prophet is acceptable in his fatherland (Luke 4:22-24).**

In the book of Matthew, Jesus said, **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his fatherland, and in his house” (Matthew 13:57).** In the book of Mark, Jesus said, **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his fatherland, and among his kin, and in his house” (Mark 6:4).** It is not uncommon for the record in one of the biographies of Jesus to have more detail about what was said or done than was written in another book.

When Gentiles were blessed instead of Israelites

- **But in truth I say to you, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine occurred on all the land. And Elijah was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, to a widow woman of Sidon. And many lepers were in Israel near Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian.**
- **And all in the synagogue were filled with rage, having heard these things. And having risen up, they thrust him outside of the city, and brought him as**

far as the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw him down headlong. But he, having passed through the midst of them, departed (Luke 4:25-30).

Jesus merely mentioned to the people two events describe in the Old Testament (see First Kings 17:9-16 and Second Kings 5). What he said was completely true. However, the Jews had so much hatred for the Gentiles that they wanted to kill him because of what those examples taught. Namely, that God sometimes favored Gentiles over the Hebrews. And the lesson for us is that we should sometimes expect people to become furious when we use the Bible to teach things that violate their cherished attitudes and beliefs. Even though what we say is true, they will be enraged when we teach it.

People are often very irrational and emotional about what they believe. That irrational and emotional intensity about their beliefs is manifested, not only by religious people, but by secular ones as well, such as many Darwinists. Beware of such men, and do not try to reason with them when they become enraged. Do what Jesus did when they tried to attack him, whether physically or verbally.

Jesus taught with authority

- **And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the sabbath day, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with authority** (Luke 4:31-32).

The people were astonished because they had never heard a man teach them with such authority. Jesus seemed to be only an itinerant preacher, yet he taught them things beyond what they had been taught before. Indeed, he often contrasted what he taught with what they had been taught before. For example, in his sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5), five times he said to the people, **“Ye have heard that it was said But I say to you...”** (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43).

The Jews did add many traditions and laws to those of Moses, which they call the “oral law.” However, those additions were all endorsed by the chief priests and elders. They were not added by itinerant preachers like Jesus. Nor were they added by the scholars without first being endorsed by the chief priests and elders.

The oral laws of the Jews are actually sins against God, because Moses said, **“Whatever thing I command you, that shall ye observe to do. Thou shall not add to it, nor diminish from it”** (Deuteronomy 12:32). The only exception Moses gave was the coming of the Christ. For he said to the sons of Israel, **“Jehovah thy God will raise up for thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brothers, like me. Ye shall hearken to him ...”** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The Jews not only disobeyed the command against adding or diminishing the laws of Moses, but they disobeyed the command to hearken to the prophet like Moses that God sent to them. Jesus was like Moses in being a law giver who had the power to perform miracles. And Jesus brought us the new law of God: his good news of our salvation, which is a law of liberty.

Casting out an unclean spirit

- **And in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean deity. And it cried out in a great voice, saying, Oh no! What is with us and with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Did thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou are, the Holy man of God. And Jesus rebuked it, saying, Be thou muzzled, and come out of him.**
- **And the demon having thrown him down in the midst, it came out of him, not having harmed him. And amazement developed in all, and they spoke among each other, saying, What is this word? Because with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out. And a report about him went forth into every place of the region around (Luke 4:33-35).**

Unclean spirits are also called demons, and they are very mysterious creatures. For example, some of them cause a man to act very wildly; some of them cause epilepsy; some of them cause deafness. The above passage does not say what the evils were that the unclean spirit caused in this man.

All of the unclean spirits that saw Jesus recognized him as the Son of God, which suggests to me that they had been cast down from heaven where they knew him. They were cast down because they corrupted their spirits into uncleanness. And they all hated Jesus, and wanted nothing to do with him. They also feared him, because they knew he had the power to destroy them. And in this case the unclean spirit even asked Jesus if that was what he was going to do.

When the unclean spirit said, **“Did thou come to destroy us?”** he spoke in the plural, which meant he was asking Jesus if he was going to destroy all of the unclean spirits. Remember, one demon asked Jesus if he was going to destroy them before the time (see Matthew 8:29). That “time” may mean either the end of the world, or the beginning of the thousand year reign of Christ in the world when Satan is bound and cast into the abyss (see Revelation 20:1-7).

When Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man, the spirit convulsed him and cried out in a great voice. Other examples show that unclean spirits do not like to leave the bodies of those they possess. Spirits without bodies are naked, and nakedness is always associated with weakness and vulnerability. It is also associated with shame, but unclean spirits are shameless creatures anyway.

The power that Jesus had over unclean spirits astonished the people because they had never seen anything like it. Consequently, his fame spread widely in the entire region around.

Healing Peter's mother-in-law

- **And having arisen from the synagogue, he entered into the house of Simon. And Simon's mother-in-law was gripped by a great fever, and they besought him about her. And having stood over her, he rebuked the fever.**

And it left her, and immediately after rising up, she served them (Luke 4:38-39).

Nothing is ever said about Peter's marriage, or anything about his wife. Indeed, the Bible says nothing about any of the wives of the apostles. We know not how many were married, nor anything about who the women were. We do know that Paul never married, because he indicated that in some of his letters. Nothing is ever said about Peter's father-in-law either, although his father Jonah is mentioned elsewhere (see John 1:42).

Notice how Peter's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus as soon as she was healed. She was obviously a righteous woman eager to serve others.

Jesus healed many and cast out demons

- **And when the sun was setting, all, as many as had those who were incapacitated with various diseases, brought them to him. And having laid his hands on each one of them, he healed them. And also demons came out from many, crying out, and saying, Thou art the Christ, the Son of God. And rebuking them, he did not allow them to speak, because they knew him to be the Christ** (Luke 4:40-41).

Jesus may not have made himself available until evening, because that is when they brought people to him to heal. Or perhaps they did not learn he was there until then. Nevertheless, he always healed them. I cannot think of a time in the entire New Testament record where it was reported that Jesus did not heal someone who was afflicted with a disease or a demon when they asked him.

Regarding the demons, Jesus did not allow them to speak. Of course, the only way they could speak was through the mouth of whomever they possessed. Nevertheless, Jesus forbade them because they knew who he was. And Jesus did not want to be announced that way. He had his own time and way to declare who he was.

Jesus never allowed evil spirits to be witnesses for him. God wants righteous souls to be witnesses for him not evil ones. Indeed, God wants no help for holy things from anything that is evil. Consider this example from the law of Moses: **"Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of Jehovah thy God for any vow, for even both these are an abomination to Jehovah thy God"** (Deuteronomy 23:18). Male prostitutes were called dogs. God would not allow earnings from people doing evil things to be contributed to his holy work. And Jesus would not allow evil spirits to testify for him.

Jesus needed to preach in many places

- **And when it became day, having departed, he went to a desolate place. And the multitudes sought him, and they came to him, and were restraining him—not depart from them. But he said to them, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because I was sent for this. And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee** (Luke 4:42-44).

The Bible mentions several times how Jesus sought privacy to pray, and it was often after nightfall or before dawn. Communities sometimes urged Jesus to leave, and sometimes they urged him to stay, usually depending upon what he did and said, plus the character of the community. This was a good village because they were not offended by his preaching, and they wanted him to stay. However, the mission of Jesus required him to preach to many people throughout Israel. For Jesus said, “... **because I was sent for this.**” Although he began his ministry in Galilee, and he was preaching in their synagogues there, he did not remain just in Galilee.

Jesus taught the crowds from a boat

- **Now it came to pass, while the multitude pressed upon him to hear the word of God, and having stood still, he was beside the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen having gone out of them, were washing their nets. And having entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And having sat down, he taught the crowds from the boat (Luke 5:1-3).**

Jesus taught the multitudes more than once from a boat. See for example Mark 3:7-8. This time, however, it was a boat that was owned by Simon (Peter). Jesus asked Simon to put the boat a little from the land, and he no doubt told him why. For the passage says Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. The passage says that the people were pressing upon him, and being in the boat kept them from that.

Sometimes they pressed upon Jesus to be healed, but this time the passage says they pressed upon him to hear the word of God. Jesus not only did astonishing miracles of healing, but his teachings were also astonishing to the multitudes. For when the chief priests and Pharisees asked the subordinates why they did not bring Jesus as they were commanded, the subordinates said, “**A man never so spoke like this man**” (John 7:46).

Jesus gives Simon a great catch of fishes

- **And when he stopped speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the depth, and let down your nets for a catch. And having answered, Simon said to him, Master, having toiled through the whole night, we took nothing, but at thy saying, I will let down the net.**
- **And having done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net was tearing. And they beckoned to their partners in the other boat, after coming, to assist them. And they came and filled both the boats, so as for them to be sunk down (Luke 5:4-7).**

When I was a youth I once was casting a net for bait (for a church fishing trip to the Keys) from a causeway in Miami, and I enclosed a large school of Mullet. I had been trying to find some for a long time without catching any. Obviously they had schooled closely together, and that was why I could not find them before. That same thing probably explains why Peter caught nothing that night.

Elsewhere in the scriptures, Jesus taught these words: **“And whoever may give to drink one of these little ones merely a cold cup in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you he will, no, not lose his reward”** (Matthew 10:42). Since Peter had allowed Jesus to use his boat to teach the people, Peter gave him something worth more than a cold cup to drink. Therefore, Jesus did not allow him to lose his reward, which was the great multitude of fishes they caught. They caught so many the weight of them even caused the boat to sink lower in the water.

Peter, James, and John follow Jesus

- **But Simon Peter having seen, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord. For astonishment surrounded him, and all those with him, at the catch of the fishes that they caught, and likewise also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.**
- **And Jesus said to Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou will be catching men. And when they brought their boats to land, after forsaking all, they followed him** (Luke 5:8-11).

Peter immediately recognized that Jesus was responsible for that great catch. Peter was a righteous man with a strong conscience, and I have no doubt he was no more sinful than the ordinary people of the Jews. But he was so humbled by the size of their catch that he felt unworthy of even being in the presence of Jesus.

Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ, because John’s biography of Jesus tells how Peter and the other men had already met Jesus and learned from John the immerser that Jesus was the Christ (see John 1:34-41). However, Jesus had not called them to follow him until after this demonstration of his divine powers. That is why Peter, James, and John immediately forsook everything and followed his invitation to catch men instead of fishes. Notice, however, they did not follow him irresponsibly. They did not abandon their boats in the lake. They docked their boats securely and then forsook them.

Jesus heals a man full of leprosy

- **And it came to pass while he was in one of the cities, behold, a man full of leprosy. And having seen Jesus, having fallen on his face, he besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou can make me clean. And having stretched forth his hand, he touched him, having said, I will, be thou clean. And straightaway the leprosy departed from him.**
- **And he commanded him to tell no man, but, After going, show thyself to the priest, and bring concerning thy cleansing, just as Moses commanded for a testimony to them. But the report about him went through more, and many multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him from their infirmities.**

- **But he himself was withdrawing into the desolate regions, and praying** (Luke 5:12-16).

Jesus sometimes refused requests made of him, but he never refused to heal a sick man. The law of Moses required lepers to live apart, and to cry out “Unclean, unclean” when people were coming near them (see Leviticus 13:45). In the law of Moses touching a leper made a man unclean. Nevertheless, Jesus touched the leper when he made him clean. Jesus was the Son of God, who lived without sin. He could not be made unclean that way because he had the power to make those who were unclean become clean.

The command that Jesus gave to the healed man was a requirement of the law of Moses whenever a leprous man was healed. That law is recorded in the book of Leviticus (see Leviticus 14). One of the duties of the priests was to verify if someone or something was unclean. And the priests were also to verify if what had been unclean became clean. The law of Moses emphasized cleanliness, especially with dead flesh and skin diseases. Those ancient peoples knew nothing of germs in those days, but God always has. Therefore, he gave them such laws to help protect them.

The Bible mentions several times when Jesus withdrew somewhere to pray in private. He prayed both in public and in private, depending upon the circumstances.

Jesus taught and healed

- **And it came to pass during one of those days, he was also teaching. And there were seated Pharisees and law teachers, who were men having come out of every town of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was to heal them** (Luke 5:17).

The Pharisees and law teachers often criticized Jesus, and they were almost always opposed to him. On this occasion they had gathered from many places to hear his teachings. And Jesus was not only teaching the people, but he was healing those in need.

When the passage says the power of the Lord was to heal them, it means Jesus was using the power of God to heal the sick. For all that Jesus did was by the power of God, because he said, “**I can from myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I seek not my will, but the will of the Father who sent me**” (John 5:30), and, “**The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works**” (John 14:10).

Jesus' authority to forgive sins

- **And behold, men bringing a man on a bed who was paralyzed. And they sought to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And not having found how they might bring him in because of the multitude, after going up upon the housetop, they let him down through the tiles with the small bed into the midst in front of Jesus. And having seen their faith, he said to him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.**

- **And the scholars and the Pharisees began to deliberate, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, except God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, having responded, he said to them, Why do ye deliberate in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk?**
- **But that ye may know that the Son of man has authority upon earth to forgive sins (he said to the paralyzed man), I say to thee, Arise, and after taking up thy small bed, go to thy house. And immediately having risen up before them, after taking up that on which he lay, he departed to his house glorifying God. And amazement gripped all, and they glorified God. And they were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today (Luke 5:18-26).**

Jesus always praised the efforts of industrious men who strive for righteous things. And the extra effort made by the friends of that paralyzed man is a good example.

Jesus gave many signs and wonders to prove that God was with him. And healing that paralyzed man was one of them. For only God has the power to do such things. Unlike popular mythology, the devil has no power to perform anything supernaturally the way Jesus did, nor does anyone else.

And remember, Jesus said it was the power of God that enable him to heal. Jesus always gave the Father credit for what he could do. Therefore, we certainly should always give the Father credit for the good that we can do.

The scholars and Pharisees were so blinded in their hearts, that they never appreciated anything Jesus could do. But the common people did. The multitudes marveled and glorified God for giving such authority to men. Jesus used that authority, not to tyrannize the people or to make himself rich, but to help the sick and afflicted, and to glorify the Father.

Regarding Jesus' authority to forgive sins, Jesus proved he had that authority by his power to heal the paralyzed man. For he said his power to heal the man was **"that ye may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins ..."** Anybody can say, "Thy sins have been forgiven thee." But only Jesus had the power to tell the man to arise and walk, and it would happen. Later Jesus gave that power to his apostles and some others among his followers before the New Testament was written.

Notice the compassion Jesus had for the paralyzed man. Jesus healed both the body of the man and his spirit. He told the man his sins were forgiven him. That suggests the man's paralysis was a result of sins he had committed. Many of our afflictions are because of our personal sins. However, many of them are caused by the sins of others. The example of Job proves that our suffering is not always caused by our own sins.

Eating with tax collectors and sinners

- **And after these things he went forth and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And he said to him, Follow me. And after leaving behind all, having risen up, he followed him. And Levi made a great feast**

for him in his house, and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were relaxing with them.

- **And their scholars and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners? And having answered, Jesus said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those faring badly. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:27-32).**

Levi was also called Matthew. And after following Jesus, Matthew was later chosen to become one of his apostles.

Regarding the tax collectors, people have never enjoyed having to pay taxes. However, those tax collectors were especially resented by the Jews because they were serving the Roman occupation of their country. Hence, those tax collectors were considered contemptible men in the eyes of the people, and they were ranked with sinners. They were ranked with sinners because the people considered those taxes illegitimately imposed by a foreign power.

Although Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners, he did not fraternize with them. He accepted their invitations so that he would have an opportunity to convert them. He was primarily a physician of the spirit who came to save lives not destroy them. Healing their bodies was to provide evidence in support of his main goal.

When Jesus commanded repentance, it was for those who needed it. All men need repentance to some degree, but the righteous need no persuasion. They want to repent when they find themselves guilty, just as the apostle Paul did when he learned that he had been persecuting Christ. Sinners need to be called to repentance. They need to be motivated to repent.

When to fast

- **And they said to him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make supplications, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but thine eat and drink. And he said to them, Ye cannot make the sons of the wedding hall fast while the bridegroom is with them. But the days will also come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.**
- **And he also spoke a parable to them. No man puts a patch of a new garment on an old garment, otherwise both the new tears, and that from the new will not blend with the old. And no man puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine will burst the wineskins, and will itself be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved together. And no man having drunk old straightaway desires new, for he says, The old is better (Luke 5:33-39).**

Jesus was always completely rational in his teaching, and the above description is one example. It is inappropriate to fast during times of celebration. And it is foolish not to match things together properly. One commonly quoted modern example is how one rotten

apple will spoil the entire barrel. Another example that is common to modern times would be to keep adding fresh milk to a container with some residue of old milk. The old milk will eventually sour and spoil all of it including the fresh milk. Living wisely means living rationally. And having faith in God and Christ is the most rational thing we can do.

There are many passages that describe Jesus healing. Nevertheless, they are only a small sample because the apostle John said, **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25). The record we have of the healings that he did show us what he could do, and how compassionate he was toward the sick and the afflicted.

Things allowed on the sabbath

- **Now it came to pass for him to be going through the grain fields on a particular sabbath, and his disciples were plucking the ears and were eating, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said to them, Why do ye what is not permitted to do on the sabbath day?**
- **And having answered them, Jesus said, Have ye not read even this, what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him, how he entered into the house of God, and took and ate the loaves of the presentation, and also gave to those who were with him, which is not permitted to eat, except the priests alone? And he said to them, The Son of man is lord also of the sabbath** (Luke 6:1-5).

Plucking the ears of grain in a grain field was permitted by the law of Moses. For the law says, **“When thou come into thy neighbor’s vineyard, then thou may eat thy fill of grapes at thine own pleasure, but thou shall not put any in thy vessel. When thou come into thy neighbor’s standing grain, then thou may pluck the ears with thy hand, but thou shall not move a sickle to thy neighbor’s standing grain”** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25).

That law was an example of how Jehovah wanted his people to be a brotherhood, generous and sharing with each other. However, there were few handouts; the recipients were to work for most of what they were given, as other laws show (see for example Leviticus 19:9-10).

Regarding the sabbath, the weekly sabbath day of rest was unique to the Israelites. And the rest of the world has discovered what a wonderful blessing it is. There seems to be a natural need for every man to rest at least one day a week. Christians are not bound by the sabbath law, because we are under the law of liberty. Therefore, we can adjust our times of rest to fit circumstances. Nevertheless, it is still wise to try to have such a time of weekly rest whenever possible, although not necessarily a specific day of the week as the law of Moses required.

By the time of Jesus the Jews had added many more restrictions to what they were allowed to do on the sabbath than Moses ever gave. For example, they created what was called a sabbath day’s journey, which defined specifically how far they could travel on that day.

The Jews had completely perverted the original purpose of the sabbath. God gave the sabbath to bless the people not to add more burdens to them. That is why Jesus said, **“The sabbath came into being for sake of man, and not man for sake of the sabbath”** (Mark 2:27).

The Pharisees were especially blinded by a legalistic interpretation of the righteousness of God. However, Jesus exposed the contradiction that such a mentality creates. The Pharisees were so blindly legalistic that there were times when they would rather have the sick and afflicted continue suffering rather than violate their narrow interpretation of the law. Yet inwardly they were wretched sinners, being **“inside full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness”** (Matthew 23:27).

Here is the law about the loaves of the presentation (also called showbread): **“And thou shall take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes of it. Two tenth parts of an ephah shall be in one cake. And thou shall set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before Jehovah. And thou shall put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire to Jehovah.**

“Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually. It is on the behalf of the sons of Israel, an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons. And they shall eat it in a holy place, for it is most holy to him of the offerings of Jehovah made by fire by a perpetual statute” (Leviticus 24:5-9).

David and those with him ate the loaves of the presentation, which were for the priests, at one time when he was fleeing Saul who wanted to kill him. Here is what the record says about it: **“Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling, and said to him, Why are thou alone, and no man with thee?**

“And David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has commanded me a business, and has said to me, Let no man know anything of the business about which I send thee, and what I have commanded thee, and I have assigned the young men to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thy hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread. If only the young men have kept themselves from women.

“And David answered the priest, and said to him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days. When I came out the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was but a common journey. How much more then today shall their vessels be holy? So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there but the showbread that was taken from before Jehovah to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away” (First Samuel 21:1-6).

David was not forthright with Ahimelech the priest because he no doubt did not want Ahimelech to be accused of aiding him while he was fleeing king Saul. Nevertheless, Saul was such a wicked man that he later killed Ahimelech and all the priests there (85 of them) even though Ahimelech knew nothing about Saul’s accusations against David.

Incidentally, when Ahimelech the priest said he would give David the holy bread, **“If only the young men have kept themselves from women,”** that was because sexual intimacy

is a messy process, making both the man and the woman unclean. That uncleanness would have prevented them from eating of the holy bread.

It was not that sexual intimacy itself is an unholy thing, as the Roman Catholics teach. That perverse idea is why they invented the myth that Mary the mother of Jesus was born of an immaculate conception, meaning she was not corrupted with “original sin” (another false concept) by what they call, that “unholy” process.

Here is the law of Moses about that physical uncleanness: **“And if any man’s seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall bathe all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the evening. And every garment, and every skin, on which is the seed of copulation, shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening. The woman also with whom a man shall lie with seed of copulation, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening”** (Leviticus 15:16-18).

Regarding what David said to Ahimelech, God never criticized David for not being forthright with Ahimelech or for taking the loaves of the presentation, which were for the priests only. Indeed, Jesus gave that story as an example of how God does not want us to blindly apply his laws in a rigid legalistic way.

Jesus also reminded those Pharisees that the priests continued their duties on the sabbath day. For example, they set forth fresh loaves of the presentation each sabbath, as the above commandment in Leviticus said: **“Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually.”** They also made animal sacrifices on the altar during the sabbath day (see Numbers 28:9-10). In other words, they defiled the sabbath by working on that day. And yet they were guiltless before God. Laws should never be applied blindly and rigidly.

The house of God was the temple. And Jesus told those Pharisees that a greater than the temple was there. He was, of course, speaking about himself because he is the Son of God. And being the Son of God made him Lord of the sabbath. Those Pharisees were completely unjustified in their criticism about Jesus’ disciples and the sabbath.

Entering a synagogue to teach

- **And it also came to pass on another sabbath for him to enter into the synagogue and teach** (Luke 6:6).

Like the word church, the word synagogue means gathering, assembly, or congregation. The law of Moses said nothing about synagogues. Their worship was to be primarily through animal sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. And about those sacrifices, the law said, **“But to the place which Jehovah your God shall choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there, even to his habitation ye shall seek, and there thou shall come. And there ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock.**

“And there ye shall eat before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand to, ye and your households, in which Jehovah thy God has blessed thee. ... Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou see, but in the place which Jehovah shall choose in one of thy tribes. There

thou shall offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shall do all that I command thee”
(Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 13-14).

The place God chose for their animal sacrifices was Jerusalem. However, about five centuries before Christ, because of their continual sins, God used an enemy army to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and have the small remnant of the Jews carried away captive to Babylon. Therefore, they could no longer worship him that way. Consequently, the Jews invented the synagogue to keep them united in their devotion to God; meaning the few who wanted to be faithful.

However, even after the Jews returned and rebuilt Jerusalem, the temple, and their nation they continued to build and use synagogues. Synagogues were a convenient way for the devout to gather together on the sabbath day to pray and study the scriptures. Like the meaning of the word synagogue, the meaning of the word church now includes the building where the faithful gather.

It should also be noted that even though the law of Moses said nothing about synagogues, Jesus never said a word against them. Indeed, he often gathered in them with the people. Additions of convenience have never been condemned by God, as long as they do not violate a command or are made into another law to make them compulsory for everyone. Additions to God’s commandments are always condemned.

Healing on the sabbath

- **And a man was there, and his right hand was withered. And the scholars and the Pharisees watched if he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And having risen, he stood up.**
- **Then Jesus said to them, I will question you. What? Is it permitted on the sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save life, or to kill? And having looked around on them all, he said to him, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did, and his hand was restored whole as the other** (Luke 6:6-10).

That is another example of their blind legalistic interpretation of the commands of God. They thought it was illegal to heal on the sabbath day. Therefore, they watched Jesus to see if he would heal, and that would give them something to accuse him. However, Jesus asked them what was allowed on the sabbath day: doing good or doing harm, saving life or killing?

But those hypocrites would not even answer him. They knew if they did he would prove them wrong, because he had always proven them wrong. Nevertheless, they never gave up their rigid legalism regardless of how effectively Jesus reasoned with them. Whenever he defeated them, they would just leave enraged and plot against him.

They were filled with fury

- **But they were filled with fury, and deliberated with each other what they might do to Jesus (Luke 6:11).**

Unlike the common people, who rejoiced when Jesus performed such miracles of healing, those Pharisees were filled with fury. Those hypocrites were filled with fury, not because they were zealous for the laws of God, but because Jesus would not pander to their rigid legalism. Jesus always spoke the truth, but they were not interested in truth. Their greatest desire in public was to make a good impression to the people, and they could not do that with Jesus.

Jesus appoints his twelve apostles

- **And he happened in these days to go out onto the mountain to pray, and he was continuing all night in prayer to God. And when it became day, he called his disciples, and chose twelve from them, whom he also named apostles:**
- **Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor (Luke 6:12-16).**

Here is the list of names of the twelve men Jesus selected to be his apostles:

Simon Peter
Andrew the brother of Peter
James
John
Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James the son of Alphaeus
Simon who was called the Zealot. Matthew and Mark call him the Canaanite.
Judas the son of James. Matthew calls him Lebbadus, surnamed Thaddaeus, which is what Mark calls him.
Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor.

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of God (see Matthew 16:19), which he used to open its doors (figuratively) when he offered the Jews to become disciples of Christ after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2). James and John were brothers, and together with Peter were considered “pillars” of the church (see Galatians 2:9). Those three were the men Jesus selected to go with him on special occasions.

Thomas is best known for being a skeptic, because of which people now refer to him as doubting Thomas. Matthew wrote a biography of Jesus. He is also called Levi (see Luke 5:27). Andrew and Philip are occasionally mentioned in the new testament. Several men in

the new testament are named James. James the son of Alphaeus is probably the James that is mentioned several times in the book of Acts as serving in a special way. Bartholomew, Judas the son of James, and Simon who was called the Zealot are only mentioned when the apostles are listed. Judas Iscariot is the man who betrayed him.

Jesus prayed on the mountain throughout the night, after which he appointed those twelve men to become apostles to serve the most important role of his ministry. Remember the word apostle means sent on a mission. And his apostles were the men who carried on his ministry after he ascended into heaven. It was through them that Christ established his church and spread the good news of our salvation.

There is little doubt that much (if not most) of what Jesus prayed that night was about his apostles and how he would use them in his ministry. Every one of those men were righteous, except for Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew it, for he said to them at the last supper, **“Did I not choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?”** (John 6:70).

Jesus only chose Judas in order to fulfill the prophecy about his betrayal. Those other men that he chose were sufficiently strong in their spirit and character that Jesus knew they would serve him well and faithfully. And the Bible record shows they did.

And not one of them had been highly educated or came from any exalted status. Remember, the scriptures even say that Peter and John were illiterate men (see Acts 4:13). And that was the case for most people during those ancient times. The only one of his apostles who had been highly educated was Paul, and he was appointed long after Jesus had ascended into heaven. There is no evidence that Paul even saw Jesus while he was on the earth.

Jesus taught and healed

- **And having come down with them, he stood on a level place. And a company of his disciples, and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and the maritime Tyre and Sidon, were those who came to hear him, and to be healed from their diseases, also those who were afflicted with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And all the multitude sought to touch him, because power came forth from him, and healed them all** (Luke 6:17-19).

Teaching and healing were the two parts of Jesus' ministry. He taught the people to prepare them for the kingdom of God, the church, which was established soon after he ascended into heaven. And he healed the people not only because he was compassionate toward them, but to prove that he taught the truth, and God was really with him. For the power that came forth from him to heal was the power of God.

Notice how the passage says the power healed those who touched him. It was power that enabled Jesus to heal all who were afflicted with diseases or unclean spirits. Power takes energy, and the energy Jesus used was from the Spirit of God. God rested the seventh day after the creation of the world. He rested because of the enormous amount of energy he used to create this vast universe of ours. When the Bible says he spoke things into exis-

tence, that simply means he directed his energy to create them. I say much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Regarding the maritime Tyre and Sidon, those were both Gentile cities. However, they bordered Israel, and apparently many Jews had been living there, because Jesus went to those regions even though he said he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It was only after the establishment of the kingdom of God, the church, that he sent his apostles to preach to the Gentiles (see Acts 10).

Matthew describes how Jesus initially refused to heal the daughter of a Gentile woman from those regions: **“And having gone out from there, Jesus departed into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman having come out from those regions, cried out to him, saying, Be merciful to me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously demon-possessed. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples having approached, they besought him, saying, Send her away, because she cries out behind us. But having answered, he said, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:21-24). Nevertheless, he did heal her daughter because of her great faith in him.

Those who are blessed

- **And having lifted up his eyes on his disciples, he said, Blessed are the poor, because the kingdom of God is what belongs to you. Blessed are those who hunger now, because ye will be filled. Blessed are those who weep now, because ye will laugh** (Luke 6:20-21).

Similar words were also recorded in the book of Matthew when it tells about Jesus' sermon on the mount. The first two of those three blessings mentioned in Luke are listed with the seven given in Matthew. The third one here in this passage from Luke is different. It is similar to the one in Matthew that says those who mourn will be comforted, but the one here seems to show a greater contrast in feelings: weeping and laughing.

Jesus said if we weep now we will laugh. That means if we accept the suffering required of all who promote righteousness and oppose wickedness, then in the afterlife we will have joy. Therefore, laughter itself is not condemned. Indeed, the Bible even mentions the Lord laughing.

For example, when the second psalm tells how man rebels against God, it says, **“He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his great displeasure”** (Psalm 2:4-5). Of course, that laughing of God is figurative, and not the barking sounds that we make. His “laughing” symbolizes the contemptuous response he makes toward those who think they can rebel against him with impunity.

Laughing is condemned when it is associated with self-indulgence and other forms of sin. Laughing is not mentioned often in the Bible. Indeed, the New Testament only mentions laughter two other times, and in both of them it is condemned: Luke 6:25 and James 4:9. Laughter was condemned in those passages because it applied to sinners who were indulging their pleasures instead of obeying God.

Solomon said that laughter should always be done appropriately. For there is a time to laugh and a time not to laugh: **“For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to break down, and a time to build up, a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together, a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to seek, and a time to lose, a time to keep, and a time to cast away, a time to tear, and a time to sew, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace”** (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Solomon also gave an example of a time to laugh, when he said, **“A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes glad the life, and money answers all things”** (Ecclesiastes 10:19). Nevertheless, he also warned about laughter: **“Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of a wise man, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 7:3-6).

And that explains why there is very little humor in the Bible. For it is a book of wisdom about the seriousness of life. Indeed, there is no record that Jesus or his apostles ever laughed. We can only conjecture about that possibility when we read of circumstances where it may have occurred.

Reward for enduring persecution

- **Blessed are ye, when men will hate you, and when they will exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, because of the Son of man. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for their fathers did in the same way to the prophets** (Luke 6:22-23).

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. Those in Matthew are similar to the ones here, but they are a little different. It must be remembered that Jesus went to many places preaching the same message. And it is unreasonable to think that he always used the exact same words when he taught. Therefore, these two accounts from Matthew and Luke may differ because they are words that Jesus spoke at different places.

One difference Jesus made in the above narrative is how he underscored the blessing that was promised to those who are hated, excluded, reviled, and called evil, because of him. If those things happen to us because of our commitment to him, then we should not only rejoice, but we should leap for joy (mostly in our hearts). We should do those things because our reward is great in heaven.

Peter and John rejoiced when they were persecuted by the rulers of the Jews. For the record says, **“Indeed therefore they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were considered worthy to be treated shamefully for the name of Jesus”** (Acts 5:41). They rejoiced because they were considered worthy to be treated shamefully for the name of Jesus.

Those words suggest that when bad things happen to us when we live righteously, it is a sign that God considers us worthy to suffer that way. Job would not have suffered the way he did if God had not considered him worthy to endure it. It was because Job was so righteous that God allowed him to be tormented so severely by Satan.

Therefore dear reader, do not wonder when you suffer in some way for righteousness, but rejoice because God considers you worthy to endure it. Although your flesh will groan, leap for joy in your heart. Have the same kind of faith that Peter and John had when they rejoiced because they suffered for the cause of Christ.

Also consider these words of Peter: **“Beloved, ye should not be surprised at the fierceness in you, which occurs for a trial to you, like a strange thing happening to you. But rejoice in so far as ye are partakers in the sufferings of the Christ, so that also at the revealing of his glory ye may rejoice, having exceeding joy”** (First Peter 4:12-13).

Remember however, Peter and John did not rejoice while they were being persecuted. They rejoiced privately afterward lest they provoke more severe persecution. Be discrete in all that you do. Remember what Jesus said: **“Become ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves”** (Matthew 10:16).

Woe to the rich

- **However, woe to you the rich, because ye have received your consolation** (Luke 6:24).

Life in this world is called a great tribulation. For Solomon said, **“It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith”** (Ecclesiastes 1:13). And that applies to all men more or less. That is why men use things like liquor and narcotics, because that gives them some relief from the sorrows of this life.

The word of God does not speak well of the rich. Although there are a few exceptions, the great majority of the rich are sinful men who live selfish lives. Therefore, Jesus said they had received their consolation for living in this great tribulation. Those of us who trust the Lord will receive our great consolation in the afterlife.

Woe to those who are filled now

- **Woe to you who are filled now, because ye will hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, because ye will mourn and weep** (Luke 6:25).

Those are two good examples to illustrate how we cannot interpret everything that Jesus said literally. Otherwise, we would be led to think it was a sin to be filled with food and to laugh. For Jesus uttered a curse to those who were filled and to those who laugh.

Jesus was not condemning having enough to eat or occasionally laughing. He was condemning those who live only to indulge their pleasures, such as gluttons and habitual party-goers. Those sinners will hunger, mourn, and weep in the afterlife.

Woe when all men speak well of you

- **Woe when men will speak well of you, for their fathers did in the same way to the false prophets** (Luke 6:26).

What Jesus taught astonishes most people when they learn the truth of it. For what he taught is so contradictory to the values of the world. The world considers it a mark of great success when all men speak well of you. Even many of those who believe in Christ seek to have all men speak well of them, especially those who receive much publicity.

Jesus uttered a curse against living in such a way that all men speak well of you. No man can live righteously in the sight of God and not be persecuted. No man can proclaim the truth of the word of God and not be rejected by the world. No man can oppose sin and wickedness and not be hated by the world. No man can be a faithful disciple of Christ when all men speak well of him. Remember that when you see everybody praising someone.

Love your enemies

- **But I say to you, to those who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you** (Luke 6:27-28).

The command to love our enemies has been one of the most misunderstood and misapplied of the Bible. It has been used to promote pacifism, and a form of pacifism of the most diabolical form. It has been used by deluded souls to excuse and forgive men guilty of the most heinous and cruel crimes imaginable. That kind of application is an extreme perversion of what Jesus actually taught.

The key to understanding his command is the meaning of the word enemy. Jesus was referring to lawful men who happen to be our competitors, our rivals, or our disputants. Examples are these: men who are on opposing teams during sporting events; men who are members of different political parties; men who are competitors in business; and men who are adversaries in other lawful ways. It also includes those who resent us for various reasons, causing them to mistreat and persecute us, but only in ways that are not criminal. The Bible teaches that criminal actions, including unlawful persecutions, must be prosecuted and punished by the proper authorities.

For example, Paul said, **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves.**

“For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

Notice how Paul said law enforcement authorities are helpers of God, **“vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil.”** And when law enforcement authorities fail to punish criminals justly, they are sinning against God by failing to be his helpers. And we sin against God when we forgive and excuse criminals who have offended us.

Jesus never included vicious lawless men in his command to love our enemies. Such men are not merely personal enemies, they are enemies of God. And we are not commanded to love such men. Indeed, the psalmist said about God, **“For thou are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil shall not sojourn with thee. The arrogant shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hate all workers of iniquity. Thou will destroy those who speak lies. Jehovah abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man”** (Psalm 5:4-6).

And here is what the prophet Malachi said about those who claim that God loves evil workers: **“Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words. Yet ye say, How have we wearied him? In that ye say, Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delights in them ...”** (Malachi 2:17). It wearies God to say that he delights in evil doers; it is a lie of the devil and those deluded by him. God does not love everybody! Indeed, God hates **“all workers of iniquity.”**

The apostle Paul, before he was converted to Christ, he persecuted Christians severely. However, it was all done legally with the support of the Jewish rulers. Therefore, praying for Paul during the time he was an enemy of Christ and his church was the kind of thing Jesus commanded. And we too must pray for those kinds of enemies.

Ensure justice

- **To him who strikes thee on the cheek offer the other also, and from him who takes away thy cloak, also do not withhold thy coat. Give to every man who asks thee, and from him who takes away thy personal things do not demand them back** (Luke 6:29-30).

Here is what Jesus said about those things in his sermon on the mount: **“Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, not to resist what is troublesome, but whoever will strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to the man who wants to sue thee, and take away thy coat, thou shall leave him thy cloak also. And whoever will draft thee for one mile, go thou with him two”** (Matthew 5:38-41).

And here are the comments I made about those words. Other translations say that Jesus taught not to resist evil or an evil person. Those are mistranslations, and they have been the source of countless miseries and sorrows. Those false translations make Jesus seem to teach pacifism. And pacifism is a form of surrender to evil men. The Bible has never taught such a thing, and Jesus did not teach it either.

As he had done with murder and adultery, Jesus taught his disciples to be willing to go beyond what the law required for just retribution. What he said was that we should not resist doing things that are required of us just because they are troublesome. Instead we should be willing to go beyond what we were required for recompense.

If we deserve a slap on the cheek, be willing to offer the other one. He did not teach that we should allow assault against us unjustly. Remember, he was relating his teaching with the laws of exact retribution, which is justice. And if we justly deserve a slap, then offer to take two.

If we are sued in court and lose our case, then we should offer to give more than required. If we are drafted by authorities to perform some task, then we should do more than is required. The disciples of Christ should have the reputation of being willing to go beyond the simple requirements of law and justice.

Regarding the matter of giving to those who ask, Matthew records Jesus saying, **“Give to him who asks thee, and turn thou not away from him who wants to borrow from thee”** (Matthew 5:42). And below is what I said about it:

That is another example of how interpreting what Jesus taught in a legalistic way leads to ridiculous conclusions. Interpreting his command literally to give to him who asks us would quickly lead every Christian into poverty. For wicked men would soon take everything we have, and laugh about what fools we are. There were many times when Jesus refused requests. Indeed, he refused to answer king Herod when he was being tried. He not only refused to answer Herod’s questions, but Jesus would not even speak to him.

The lesson in the above command is to be willing to consider other people’s requests. We should not rebuff them at once, but consider the merits of who they are and what they are requesting. Jesus ignored Herod because he knew what a wicked man Herod was. And Herod did not deserve anything from Jesus.

And that reminds me of a story in the Old Testament. King Jehoram of the ten tribes of Israel and king Jehoshaphat of Judah joined forces to fight against the kings of three other countries. When they came to inquire of the prophet Elisha, Elisha said to king Jehoram, **“As Jehovah of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee”** (Second Kings 3:14). Jehoram was an idolater and an evil king.

Jesus even rebuked a man when he made a request of him. Here is the report about that: **“And a certain man out of the crowd said to him, Teacher, speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Watch, and keep away from greed, because to any man, life to him is not in the abundance of things possessed by him”** (Luke 12:13-15).

There are numerous examples to indicate the above command about giving was never intended to be interpreted literally and legalistically. God wants us to use wisdom and good judgment in all that we do, including how we apply his commandments.

The golden rule

- **And as ye desire that men would do to you, do ye also to them likewise** (Luke 6:17-31).

That commandment is what we now call the golden rule. From the very beginning of the creation God has wanted us to treat our fellow man the way we want to be treated. The

heart of that command is a principle about the kind of attitude and behavior we should have toward other men. It is an example of the command that we should love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matthew 19:19).

Of course, as with most of Jesus' commands, the one we call the golden rule should be applied with wisdom and prudence, not literally and legalistically.

Love beyond those who love you

- **And if ye love those who love you, what credit is for you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if ye do good to those who do good to you, what credit is for you? For even sinners do the same (Luke 6:32-33).**

Jesus does not want us to be clannish. We should treat other men with just as much courtesy and consideration as we treat our friends and kin. And that includes strangers and foreigners. Indeed, the law of Moses commanded the sons of Israel to love them. For it says, **"The stranger that sojourns with you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and thou shall love him as thyself, for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God"** (Leviticus 19:34).

That command was completely ignored by the Jews during the time of Jesus, because they had nothing but contempt for all Gentiles. They even created a law forbidding a Jew to fraternize with any Gentile (see Acts 10:28). Remember how they tried to cast Jesus off a cliff when he reminded them how God sometimes favors Gentiles.

I am proud of my country for having forsaken all racial prejudice. Prejudice against the Negroes in the southern states was a cause of great reproach for many years. Even many Christians in those states were prejudiced against them. And that was a clear violation of what Jesus taught us about others. Racial prejudice against them was justified by the popular attitude that they were a subspecies of humans, which attitude is part of Darwinism.

Be generous

- **And if ye lend to whom ye hope to receive, what credit is for you? For even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, despairing nothing, and your reward will be great. And ye will be sons of the Most High, because he is good toward the ungrateful and bad (Luke 6:34-35).**

What Jesus said about lending should not be misunderstood. It was not a blanket command to lend to anybody anytime they want to borrow from us. Doing that would soon impoverish every Christian when sinners learned what we would do. For the world is filled with ruthless men with no conscience.

What Jesus no doubt meant was for us to sometimes be willing to risk not being paid back. If we have the means, and there is a genuine need by some worthy man, then we should not withhold lending to him for fear of not being paid back. It is another form of charity that we should practice. Being generous, even to men who are ungrateful or who even hate

us, is following the example of the Most High God himself. And if we want to be faithful sons then we must follow his example.

Nevertheless, as with every act of charity, we must be very judicious in how much we give and for what purpose. Remember, even God himself, the most generous of all, does not give everyone everything they ask for. Also remember these words of Solomon: **“Be not over-righteous, nor show thyself too wise. Why should thou destroy thyself?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:16). We cannot solve every man’s problems. And those who try are going to destroy themselves. Be very prudent with your charity, lest you become a prey.

Also remember, there are many poor people who are unworthy of help, not even food for them. For Paul said, **“For even when we were with you we commanded you this, that if any man will not work, neither let him eat”** (Second Thessalonians 3:10). Also remember what Jesus said about giving to certain people: **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turn back may lacerate you”** (Matthew 7:6).

Be merciful

- **Become ye therefore merciful, even as your Father is merciful** (Luke 6:36).

One of the beatitudes that Jesus spoke in his sermon on the mount is this one: **“Blessed are the merciful, because they will obtain mercy”** (Matthew 5:7). Remember, mercy refers to showing kindness to those who are either guilty or who are in need. Nevertheless, our mercy should be discerning, and not indiscriminate. As Jude said, **“But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. And on some be ye merciful—being discerning”** (Jude 1:20-22).

Be thou wise in how thou apply all of Jesus’ commands. Moreover, James said, **“For the judgment is merciless to him who did no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment”** (James 2:13). Mercy triumphs over judgment only with the merciful. For the mercy of Jesus as our redeemer is only for those who become his disciples. And no man can become a disciple of Christ who is not himself merciful.

Criticizing

- **And do not criticize, and ye will, no, not be criticized. And do not condemn, and ye will, no, not be condemned. Forgive, and ye will be forgiven** (Luke 6:37).

What did Jesus mean by not criticizing? He certainly did not mean that we should never judge. For example, John records a time when Jesus explained how healing on the sabbath was not wrong, and then he added, **“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”** (John 7:24).

What Jesus meant about not criticizing probably refers to faultfinding and being too critical. For Jesus himself criticized men like the religious leaders of the Jews. For example, Matthew records a time he called them blind leaders: **“Then having come near, his disciples said to him, Know thou that the Pharisees were offended when they heard the**

saying? But having answered, he said, Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant, will be uprooted. Leave them. They are blind leaders of blind men, and if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:12-14).

We all offend each other in small ways more or less from time to time. Such things should be forgiven, and not avenged. Otherwise bitterness and division develops, and grows and produces much harm. Forgiveness tends to beget forgiveness; bitterness and resentment beget bitterness and resentment. As disciples of Christ we should do things to heal and be productive, not amplify divisions and harm. Moreover, if we want forgiveness from God we must forgive each other.

Nevertheless, as with things like giving, forgiving should be done with wisdom and discretion. And there are some things that we have no right to forgive, such as serious crimes against God and society. I say much more about forgiving in my comments about Matthew 18:21-35.

Give to receive

- **Give, and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, they will give into your bosom. For with the same measure with which ye measure, it will be measured again to you** (Luke 6:38).

The most obvious meaning of that passage is that it teaches us to be charitable, with the promise that we will be rewarded accordingly. Indeed, Solomon said, **“There is he who scatters, and increases yet more, and there he is who withholds more than is proper, but only to want”** (Proverbs 11:24).

However, I would also like to apply what Jesus taught about giving more broadly to sharing of all kinds. For civilization cannot exist without sharing; each one giving and receiving in some ways. Economies collapse when trade diminishes. For Solomon also said, **“The people shall curse him who withholds grain, but a blessing shall be upon the head of him who sells it”** (Proverbs 11:26). Buying and selling are one way of giving and receiving. Hired labor is another way. And the more actively trade occurs the more robust economies are.

All of those things assume, of course, that there is fairness in trading. For the passage in Luke says that we will be measured with the same measure that we measure. In other words, we will receive with the same value we give. And laws are created to help ensure justice and fairness in all dealings. But that also means such laws must be enforced fairly.

Blind leading the blind

- **And he spoke a parable to them. Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a ditch?** (Luke 6:39).

In Matthew 15:14 Jesus applied those words to the Pharisees. They were indeed leaders of the Jews, but were blind to the truth of the good news of salvation that Jesus preached. And their ignorant opposition to it was also leading other ignorant Jews astray. And their

blindness was leading all of them to fall into eternal condemnation, which is far worse than falling into any earthly ditch.

A disciple and his teacher

- **A disciple is not above his teacher, but every disciple who is fully developed will be as his teacher (Luke 6:40).**

No disciple of Christ can ever be above him. However, the more we learn from him the more we can be like him, although no man can ever be anywhere near equal with him. The disciple of another teacher can develop above him, but only when he moves beyond simply being the man's disciple.

Seeing the faults of others

- **And why do thou see the speck in thy brother's eye, but do not perceive the beam in thine own eye? Or how can thou say to thy brother, Brother, allow me to take out the speck that is in thine eye, when thou thyself do not see the beam in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first take out the beam from thine own eye, and then thou will see clearly to take out the speck in thy brother's eye (Luke 6:41-42).**

Those words give a good example of faultfinding. They are, of course, figurative words, and should be applied in a relative sense. Regarding the beam in our own eye, since everyone of us knows more about our own faults and failures than anyone else, then in a relative sense, we know about the beam in our own eye, even though we may see the speck in our brother's eye. If we really want to help our brother remove some of his faults that we can see, we should remove our own faults that only we can see, especially those of our thoughts.

I think it is significant that the most guilty creature in existence is also the most accusative; namely, the devil, which very word means false accuser. And that characteristic of him is very common among his most active disciples. For they are quick to criticize the righteous with many false accusations.

Good and bad fruits

- **For a good tree is not producing corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree producing good fruit. For each tree is known from its own fruit. For they do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they harvest grapes from a bramble bush.**
- **The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth the good, and the bad man out of the bad treasure of his heart brings forth the bad, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:43-45).**

Jesus said the way to reveal the nature of a man is to observe his fruits—his manner of living and the consequences of what he does. Bad men are able to conceal their evil for a

time, but they will eventually expose themselves. Therefore, we need to be very cautious, and test the authenticity of whomever we must deal with.

Indeed, that is commanded, because the apostle John said to us, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but examine the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (First John 4:1). It is our duty to examine the spirits, the spirits of men. And any man who resents being examined has things he wants to hide, and therefore must be treated with great caution and suspicion.

Praising but not obeying

- **And why do ye call me, Lord, Lord, and not do the things that I say?** (Luke 6:46).

In that passage Jesus is warning that it takes much more than simply believing and doing some good works to be recognized by him. The Pharisees and the scholars were zealous about honoring God, and they no doubt did some good works. However, they were hypocrites whom Jesus condemned.

He called them whitewashed tombs because they appeared righteous before men, but inside were **“full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness”** (Matthew 23:27). Jesus said such hypocrites were workers of lawlessness. They may commit no crimes, but they sin against God and his righteousness. They are lawless regarding the righteousness of God.

I have seen and continue to see many examples of such men. I am especially aware of those who claim allegiance to Christ, because I have learned enough about the word of God to see how much they disobey him. Indeed, most of the popular leaders among those who believe in Christ work lawlessness against him because they disobey his commands.

For example, the leaders of the Catholic church make no effort to obey most of the commands given by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament. Consider how similar they are to this description of the Pharisees that Jesus gave: **“But all their works they do in order to be seen by men. And they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the hems of their garments. And they love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be designated by men, Rabbi, Rabbi”** (Matthew 23:5-7).

And the great majority of the leaders of the protestant churches teach against obeying the very command required for us to become a Christian. For Jesus said, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:16). And Peter said, **“... in the days of Noah who prepared an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water. Which counterpart—immersion—now also saves us, not the putting away of filth of flesh, but an appeal of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...”** (First Peter 3:21). No man can receive salvation without being immersed in water for the remission of his sins. Yet the great majority of the leaders of those who say they believe in Christ teach against it.

Building on a solid foundation

- **Every man who comes to me, and hears my sayings, and does them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man who builds a house, who dug and excavated, and laid a foundation upon the rock. And when a flood developed, the stream beat upon that house, and could not shake it, for it had been founded upon the rock.**
- **But he who heard, and not having done, is like a man who built a house upon the soil without a foundation, on which the stream beat, and straightaway it fell. And the ruin of that house became great (Luke 6:47-49).**

The foundation of a building is what supports it. A foundation of sand has no strength to endure any kind of stress. Therefore, if a building is going to last it must be built upon something solid like rock. Jesus used that lesson to teach us the importance of having a solid foundation for our lives.

The Bible says that the very throne of God is supported by a foundation. And that foundation is righteousness and justice. For the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). That means righteousness and justice support God’s authority over all things. God is not a tyrant who rules arbitrarily by whim. Everything he does is supported by righteousness and justice.

A prophecy by Isaiah told how the Christ would be a sure foundation: **“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation. He who believes in him shall, no, not be shamed”** (Isaiah 28:16). And Paul said about him, **“For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”** (First Corinthians 3:11).

Having a solid foundation is essential not only for the construction of buildings, but for the development of our lives, especially our spiritual lives. And there is no greater foundation for us than to establish our lives on the good news of Jesus Christ. Because when trials and tribulations come, every life founded upon the good news of Christ will endure. And on the great day of judgment when every man is tried by Christ, we will stand with him.

The centurion’s great faith

- **And when he completed all his sayings in the ears of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s bondman faring badly was going to perish, who was esteemed by him. And having heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him who asked him that, having come, he would save his bondman. And when they came to Jesus they urged him earnestly, saying, He is worthy for whom thou may offer this, for he loves our nation, and he himself built the synagogue for us.**
- **And Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far distant from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, Lord, be not troubled, for I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof.**

Therefore neither did I consider myself worthy to come to thee, but speak by word, and my boy will be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having soldiers under myself. And I say to this man, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my bondman, Do this, and he does.

- **And when Jesus heard these things, he marveled him, and having turned around to the multitude who followed him, he said, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith. And those who were sent, having returned to the house, found the bondman who was feeble, being well (Luke 7:1-10).**

See Matthew (8:5-10, 13) for some of my comments about those things. The record of that story in Matthew is more abbreviated than it is here in Luke. Moreover, the record in Matthew gives the impression that the centurion himself came and spoke with Jesus. However, the record here in Luke says he first sent elders of the Jews to ask Jesus. And then when Jesus was coming he sent friends as messengers to speak for him. The record in Luke suggests the Centurion never actually saw Jesus and spoke with him.

The difference is not a discrepancy. It is merely the difference in the detail given. Matthew gave the gist of what the Centurion did, while Luke gives more detail. It is not uncommon to say that a man did something when someone else actually performed it.

For example, the Bible speaks of king Solomon building the temple in Jerusalem. However, nobody thinks that Solomon actually did any of the construction. He build that temple through the hands of other men. And likewise when the text says the Centurion went and spoke to Jesus, he did so through other men. Moreover, there are many times in the Bible when it tells how God spoke, but it was through the mouth of a heavenly agent.

And I say again, dear reader, let not scoffers lead you astray when they try to discredit the testimony of the Bible by claiming such things are contradictions. They are blind leaders of the blind. Be not deceived by them.

Another remarkable thing about that centurion is how well respected he was by the Jews. They even allowed him to build the synagogue for them. Those things are remarkable because the Jews had a very deep resentment toward the Roman occupation as well as contempt for Gentiles in general. Remember, they even had a law forbidding any Jew to fraternize with a Gentile or even visit with them (see acts 10:28).

That centurion was either a proselyte of the Jews or at least a Gentile who worshipped Jehovah like the centurion Cornelius (see Acts 10). For the elders of the Jews in Capernaum made urgent request of Jesus on behalf of that centurion and even praised him. And Jesus praised him for his great faith, saying it was even greater that what he found in Israel. What he meant by Israel was no doubt the population of Israelites, because Capernaum was in Galilee. During the time of Jesus the only parts of the original nation of Isreal were Judea and Galilee.

Restoring the life of a widow's only son

- **And it came to pass on the next day that he went to a city called Nain, and a considerable number of his disciples went with him, also a large multitude. Now when he came near to the gate of the city, behold, an only begotten son who died was being carried out for his mother. And she was a widow, and a considerable crowd of the city was with her.**
- **And when the Lord saw her, he felt compassion toward her, and said to her, Weep not. And having come, he touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stood still. And he said, Young man, I say to thee, arise. And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. And fear seized all. And they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has been raised among us, and, God came to help his people (Luke 7:11-16).**

Wherever Jesus went he used every opportunity to do good. And this was indeed an opportunity to show compassion and do good for a worthy cause. Being a widow in those days was a great handicap, especially if she had no children to help her. Paul even gave special instructions for how the church should aid widows (see First Timothy 5).

In his compassion the first thing Jesus did was to tell the widow to weep not. He empathized with her great sorrow. Then, after raising her son from the dead, he gave the boy to her. Jesus made no effort to dramatize that great miracle. His focus was upon showing mercy to that suffering woman.

The fear that seized all of the people was very natural. Who would not fear if during a funeral service the deceased suddenly raised himself up in the coffin and began to speak? I can even imagine hearing the gasps, screams, and cries of all who witnessed such a mighty miracle. Nevertheless, after the initial shock, the people glorified God, and gave him the credit for raising a great prophet among them and helping his people Israel.

John the immerser inquires of Jesus

- **And this report about him went forth in the whole of Judea, and in all the region around. And the disciples of John informed him about all these things. And having summoned a certain two of his disciples, John sent them to Jesus, saying, Are thou he who comes, or do we look for another man? And when they came to him, they said, John the immerser has sent us to thee, saying, Are thou he who comes, or do we look for another man? (Luke 7:17-20).**

John the immerser had earlier testified to the multitude that Jesus was the Son of God. The biography of Jesus by the apostle John gives the record of that testimony: **“On the morrow John sees Jesus coming to him, and he says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he about whom I said, After me comes a man who has become before me, because he was before me. And I had not known him, but that he would be made known to Israel. Because of this I came immersing in water.**

“And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou wilt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1:29-34).

Why then did John send two of his disciples to ask him about it? I think the answer is in the question he asked: **“... do we look for another man?”** Notice how John did not ask, “... do I look ...?” but **“... do we look ...?”** In other words, John was asking for the benefit of his disciples.

The Jews were expecting the Christ to be a great warrior-king, but Jesus was nothing like that. And so John’s disciples were probably expressing doubt about Jesus being the Christ. Therefore, John sent two of them to ask Jesus directly. John knew that as the Son of God, Jesus would speak the truth about himself.

Notice also how John sent two of his disciples. Since men are imperfect creatures, it is always better to send more than one on an important mission. For example, when Jesus sent his apostles out to proclaim the kingdom of God, he sent them in pairs: **“And he summons the twelve, and began to send them forth in pairs” (Mark 6:7).**

Moreover, notice how faithfully the messengers of John gave his message to Jesus. They used the same words that John told them to ask Jesus: **“Are thou he who comes, or do we look for another man?”** They did not change the message according to their own judgments. And that is what Bible translators should do. But alas, many popular versions have changed the message according to their own judgments. The popular NIV is one of them.

Jesus gave them proof

- **And in the same hour he healed many from diseases and plagues and evil spirits. And he granted sight to many blind men. And having answered, Jesus said to them, After going, report to John the things that ye saw and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor are preached good news (Luke 7:17-22).**

When the messengers of John asked Jesus if he was the Christ, Jesus did not rely only upon words for his response. He also showed them what he was doing. Then he told them to report to John what they heard and saw, that he was the Savior of Israel.

By performing many acts of miraculous healing, Jesus was showing how he was bringing earthly salvation to them. And by proclaiming his message of good news to the humble and lowly, he was showing how he was bringing spiritual salvation to them.

Those things were evidence to John and his disciples that he was the promised Christ, the Savior of Israel. Those things showed them that the Christ was not an earthly warrior-king, but a spiritual warrior-king, combating sin and establishing the kingdom of God.

Not being offended by him

- **And blessed is he, whoever will not be offended by me** (Luke 7:23).

I always marvel that anyone could be offended by Jesus. Yet I continually see and hear of many who are offended by him. Indeed, there is a growing number who openly express their hatred and contempt of him. However, Jesus knew that would happen, because he said, **“The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil”** (John 7:7). They hate him because he condemns their sinfulness, and sinners hate being rebuked. Sinners are offended by him because of who he is and what he stands for: truth and righteousness. And he condemns sin and wickedness.

Moreover, even believers in this very permissive generation revolt against many of his teachings. For example, they refuse to accept what he taught about punishment. They cling to the idea that God always loves everybody, and would not send anyone to the eternal punishment of hell. They claim that God always forgives everything, and we are obligated to do the same. The truth of what he taught about punishment and forgiveness is hated, and they stumble over it.

Jesus speaks about John

- **And after John’s messengers departed, he began to say to the multitudes about John, What did ye go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what did ye go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those in elegant clothing, and existing in luxury, are in kingly places. But what did ye go out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say to you, and much more than a prophet. This is he about whom it is written, Behold, I send my agent before thy face, who will prepare thy way before thee** (Luke 7:24-27).

John the immerser was not a weak man. He was a very rugged man who lived in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey. Moreover he was the agent of God (an earthly agent) who was prophesied to come ahead of Christ: **“Behold, I send my agent, and he shall prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he comes, says Jehovah of hosts”** (Malachi 3:1).

God does not choose weak men (easily shaken with the wind) to do his work. Nor does he choose men clothed in delicate clothing—men who live soft sheltered lives. He chooses strong men who are accustomed to hardship and labor. Therefore, God chose a man like John to prepare the people for the coming Christ.

John and belonging to the kingdom

- **For I say to you, among men born of women there is not one prophet greater than John the immerser, yet the smaller in the kingdom of God is greater than he** (Luke 7:28).

Jesus said that no other man was greater than John the immerser. That does not mean he was the greatest man who ever lived. It simply means he was as good as the best of them. Yet even the smaller man in the kingdom of God is greater than John. But how are we greater? We are certainly not greater in faith and righteousness. Nor are we greater in our service to God. We are only greater by virtue of being a member of the kingdom of God. Jesus was simply emphasizing the great blessing of membership in his kingdom.

John was never a member of the kingdom because it was not established until after Jesus ascended back to heaven. John never had the opportunity here on the earth. But there is no doubt he is certainly a member in heaven now. And I personally believe he ranks among the first in the position of those who are there. I base that judgment on the life he lived and what Jesus said about him. For no prophet of God was greater than he.

The people justify God

- **And all the people having heard and the tax collectors, who were immersed the immersion of John, justified God. But the Pharisees and the lawyers who were not immersed by him, rejected the purpose of God for themselves (Luke 7:29-30).**

All those who were immersed by John justified God. They were of the common people and even tax collectors. But the chief men of the Jews refused to be immersed. Those men rejected the purpose of God for themselves, which purpose was their repentance for the remission of their sins. And of all the Jews, those chief men needed repentance. For Jesus often rebuked them, calling them hypocrites.

The refusal of that generation

- **To what, then will I compare the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, and calling to each other, and saying, We piped to you, and ye did not dance. We mourned to you, and ye did not weep.**
- **For John the immerser has come neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He has a demon. The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold the man, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! (Luke 7:31-34).**

Why would Jesus rebuke that generation with those words, when the previous passage says the people justified God when he praised John? The people who justified God were those who were immersed by John. That generation of Jews as a whole did not accept either John or Jesus; the Jewish population was largely indifferent to them. Even the large multitudes that Jesus attracted were not interested in his teachings. Most of his followers enjoyed hearing him speak, but they ignored what he taught.

Jesus compared that generation of Israelites to children sitting in the marketplaces. The children wanted their companions to play with them. They tried being cheerful, but that did not work. They tried being mournful, but that did not work either. Nothing they could

do would cause their companions to play with them. Those Jews were like that. Nothing God could do would cause them to join themselves to him.

John, the prophet of God, was condemned for being severely austere in his life. Jesus, the son of God, was condemned for not being austere at all. They even accused John of having a demon, and Jesus of being **“a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”** That evil generation was going to condemn the men sent by God regardless of what they did.

I have often seen examples of how the world judges men. And the following principle commonly applies: If they like you, you can do no wrong; if they do not like you, you can do no right. Open your eyes and you will see that principle at work in the affairs of men.

Wisdom's children

- **And wisdom is justified from all her children (Luke 7:35).**

Wisdom being justified from all her children means wisdom is confirmed by the consequences of its applications. There are many things claimed to be from wisdom that result in failures. The successful applications of wisdom are what justify its truth. And the failures of false wisdom prove it is false.

Of course, any judgment of success must include the long term effects of the wisdom, as well as its immediate effects. And the consequences of the wisdom of Jesus Christ, both short term and long term have overwhelmingly justified it. In contrast, the consequences of the false wisdom of that generation of Jews resulted in their complete destruction forty years after Jesus began his ministry.

He who is forgiven much loves much

- **And a certain man of the Pharisees asked him that he would eat with him. And having entered into the Pharisee's house, he sat down. And behold, a woman in the city who was sinful. And when she knew that he sat in the Pharisee's house, having brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and having stood behind near his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with the tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. And she kissed his feet much, and anointed them with the ointment.**
- **But when the Pharisee who invited him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind the woman is who touches him, that she is sinful.**
- **And having responded, Jesus said to him, Simon, I have something to say to thee. And he says, speak Teacher. There were two debtors to a certain creditor, the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And of them not having to repay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore, do thou say, will love him more? And having answered, Simon said, I**

suppose that it was to whom he forgave more. And he said to him, Thou have judged correctly.

- **And having turned to the woman, he said to Simon, See thou this woman? I entered into thy house; thou gave no water for my feet. But this woman has wet my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gave me no kiss, but this woman, since I came in, has not ceased kissing my feet much. Thou did not anoint my head with olive oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I say to thee, her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, loves little.**
- **And he said to her, Thy sins are forgiven. And those who sat together began to say within themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, Thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace (Luke 7:36-50).**

Not only did Jesus prove to the Pharisee that he was a prophet, but he also gave him an important lesson. The lesson which says that he who is forgiven much, loves much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little. Now that does not mean those who had been the most sinful, will love Jesus the most, and those who had been the least sinful will love him the least. It means those who mourn the most about the sins they have committed (whether many or few) will love Jesus the most for being forgiven. And those who mourn the least about their sins will love Jesus the least for being forgiven.

The most righteous souls mourn the most for their sins, and they love Jesus the most for being forgiven. The least righteous have weak consciences so that they are less grieved when they sin. It is quite possible the Pharisee who criticized Jesus was actually less worthy of forgiveness than that sinful woman. For remember, Jesus said to the elders of the people who had challenged him, **“Truly I say to you, that the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”** (Matthew 21:31).

Women who served him

- **And it came to pass that he traveled through, by city and village in succession, announcing and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, and the twelve men with him, and certain women who were healed from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many other women who served them from the things they possessed (Luke 8:1-3).**

Not only did Jesus have male disciples who followed him, but he also had females as well. However, those women were never used to evangelize. They had the humble role of serving him from the things they possessed. And although those women used what they possessed to serve him, they were never given any authority, as were the men.

Regarding Mary Magdalene, heartless men have slandered her by accusing her of being a great sinner because she had been possessed by seven demons. They even claim she was a

prostitute or an adulteress. However, there is absolutely no evidence she was ever a sinner. She is only spoken of as a righteous woman who was completely devoted to our Savior. And there is no record she was ever rebuked for anything she did, either in the past or after she became a disciple of Jesus. Sinful men have also created many other myths about her.

Of the other two women mentioned in that passage, only Joanna is mentioned elsewhere. She was named as one of several women who saw two heavenly agents at the supulcher of Jesus who told them he was raised from the dead. Here is what happened after that: **“And having returned from the sepulcher, they reported all these things to the eleven, and to all the others. Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. And their sayings appeared before them as idle talk, and they disbelieved them”** (Luke 24:9-11). Nothing else is said about Chuza either.

The parable of the soil

- **And when a large multitude gathered together, and those coming to him from each city, he spoke by a parable. The man who sows went forth to sow his seed. And during his sowing, some fell by the way, and it was trampled, and the birds of the sky devoured it.**
- **And another fell on the rock, and having grown, it withered away because of not having moisture.**
- **And another fell amidst the thorns, and having grown together, the thorns choked it.**
- **And another fell on the good ground, and having grown it produced fruit a hundredfold. As he said these things, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear** (Luke 8:4-8).

Jesus spoke many parables to the multitudes, and such stories have two meanings: a physical one and a spiritual one. Parables also have several other values. One value of parables is that they tell lessons of spiritual value in the context of things the people are familiar with. Another value is that parables are easier to remember than lessons expressed in more intellectual language. Another value is that the spiritual meaning is usually concealed to those who are unworthy of it.

Jesus later explained why he wanted his teachings concealed to some, followed by an explanation of the parable. Many times Jesus said, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”** In other words, if you have the ability to understand, then use that ability. For you will be judged for it.

Jesus explained the parable to his disciples who asked him about it. And he told them why he only explained his parables to them.

Seeing and hearing but not understanding

- **And his disciples questioned him, saying, What is this parable? And he said, To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the others in parables, so that seeing they would not see, and hearing they would not understand (Luke 8:9-10).**

Jesus told his disciples they were given the privilege of knowing the mysteries of the kingdom of God but the multitude was not. The multitude was not given that privilege because they were not his disciples. And God does not allow the world to understand the good news of Christ because they reject it. They reject it because they hate truth and righteousness.

The world has a superficial knowledge of God and his holy word, but they do not understand. They cannot grasp the richness of its wisdom and knowledge. They are blinded because they reject Christ. In Matthew 13:13-15 Jesus explained more about why his disciples understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but the unbelieving multitudes do not understand.

Interpreting the parable of the soil

- **Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. And those by the way are those who hear, then the devil comes, and takes away the word from their heart, lest having believed, they would be saved.**
- **And those on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. And these have no root, who believe for a time, and withdraw in time of trial.**
- **And that which fell in the thorns, these are those who heard, and as they go they are choked by cares and wealth and pleasures of life, and do not bring to maturity.**
- **But those in the good ground, these are those who in an good and right heart, having heard the word, hold it firm, and bring forth fruit in perseverance (Luke 8:11-15).**

The four different kinds of soil in that parable (by the wayside, rocky, thorny, or good) symbolize four different kinds of spirits of men. The four different spirits are (1) those who allow the spirit of the devil working in their hearts to immediately dismiss the word of God, (2) those whose hearts are so weak and shallow that they cannot endure the tribulations and persecutions and other challenges that go with faith in Christ, (3) those who allow their worldly cares and love of money to keep them from being fruitful disciples, and (4) those whose spirits are strong and righteous so that they understand it and become very productive disciples, persevering for the cause of Christ.

Becoming visible

- **And no man, having lit a lamp, covers it with a container, or places it under a bed, but places it on a lampstand, so that those who enter in may see the light. For there is no secret that will not become visible, nor hid, that will not be known and come to be visible (Luke 8:16-17).**

We who are of the truth and the light want our ways known and our light to shine. For Jesus said, **“For every man who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God”** (John 3:20-21). And everything wrought of God is right and good and just.

Evil men try to conceal their evil deeds. And many succeed—for a time. But whether in this life or in the next one, everything ever done will become visible, including everything done in secret and concealed.

Incidentally, when Jesus spoke of entering and seeing the light, he was speaking literally. For whatever light illuminates a place, whether it be the sun or a lamp, that light is what we see. For every object that is illuminated merely reflects the source of the light. Hence, even if a lamp is not itself visible, whatever is seen is the light reflected from that light.

Having and receiving

- **Notice therefore how ye hear. For whoever has, to him will be given, and whoever has not, even what he seems to have will be taken from him (Luke 8:18).**

Jesus said to notice how we hear. For in one sense our minds are like our stomachs. Just as it is filthy and dangerous to put filthy and toxic substances in our stomachs, so also it is foolish to put filthy and dangerous things into our minds. As I have become older and wiser, I strive more actively to reject and shun things I hear and see that are filthy and dangerous. Indeed, such things now seem like putrid food to my senses; they are nauseous and repulsive. People with filthy minds are attracted to filthy experiences. People with pure and clean minds are repulsed by them, and instead are attracted to pure and clean experiences.

One of the foolish things this generation of Americans has tolerated is the proclamation of filthy words and sights. They now worship our federal Constitution, and use that document to justify allowing those evil things. But they are hypocrites, because they have very stringent rules and controls over what kinds of things can be put into our mouths. Consequently, the physical health of our citizens has improved, but their spiritual and mental health has become much worse.

The proverb that Jesus spoke, about having and receiving, expresses a profound truth. It is a general fact that whoever has, more will be given him, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away. There are numerous examples of that truth.

Here are a few: It is common knowledge among money managers that the more money a man has the more he can get, and the less a man has the more quickly it is used up. Every

educator knows that it is easy to teach an educated man, but much harder to teach one that is not educated. An industrious man will become even more industrious, while the indolent man becomes progressively more indolent. The man of faith in God continually has his faith strengthened, while the man without faith loses what he may have had.

Remember, however, there are always exceptions to every rule. And a few men can rise above such limitations, for God has given us all the power to change and strive to overcome many limitations.

Being his mother and brothers

- **And his mother and brothers came to him, and they could not come near him because of the crowd. And it was reported to him, saying, Thy mother and thy brothers stand outside, desiring to see thee. But having answered, he said to them, My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it (Luke 8:19-21).**

What righteous soul would not be greatly honored to be a close kin to Jesus? Yet he said that those who do the will of God are his true kin. Actually, we who are faithfully obedient to God are considered his brothers. Therefore, think not that Jesus' mother and his earthly brothers and sisters had any advantage over anyone who obeys God.

Calming a storm at sea

- **Now it came to pass on one of those days, that he entered into a boat, also his disciples. And he said to them, Let us pass through to the other side of the lake. And they launched forth, but as they sailed he began to sleep. And a storm of wind came down on the lake, and they were filling up, and were in peril.**
- **And having approached, they awoke him, saying, Master, master, we are perishing. And having risen, he rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and they ceased, and it became calm. And he said to them, Where is your faith? And having feared, they wondered, saying to each other, Who then is this man, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him? (Luke 8:22-25).**

Jesus never did anything only for his own comfort. I suspect one reason he was able to sleep during that terrifying storm was because he was so exhausted from his labors. Another reason is because he trusted God would always protect him. Therefore, he calmed the storm for their sakes not his. However, that does not mean we should have no fear of such things nor struggle to overcome their effects. What his disciples apparently lacked was sufficient faith that, with God's help, their efforts would be successful.

I have no doubt those men were strong and courageous, and they must have suffered many storms at sea. However, apparently this storm was so severe that they thought there was no hope. Seeing Jesus calm that powerful storm proved that Jesus was no ordinary man. And only those men had that experience. We know of it by their testimony. And trusting their

testimony should prove to us that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was truly the Son of God, because only God has the power to do such things.

There were other such things Jesus did that only his apostles and a few others experienced. However, Jesus commissioned them to share their experiences about him and his good news of salvation so that we would believe in him.

A demoniac dwelling in the sepulchers

- **And they sailed toward the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when he came forth upon the land, a certain man met him out of the city, who had demons of a considerable time. And he wore no clothing, and did not dwell in a house, but in the sepulchers** (Luke 8:26-27).

Remember, the biography of Jesus by Matthew says the place was the Gergesenes. Gadara and the Gergesa must refer to the same area. And that area and the people of it must have been part of the old tribe of Manasseh, half of which was located east of the Sea of Galilee. Otherwise Jesus would not have gone there. For he told a Canaanite woman who asked him to heal her daughter, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). And he said to his apostles when he sent them out to preach: **“Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6).

The power of those demons over that man caused him to act like a wild animal. Demons are very mysterious evil spirits. However, we can think of them like germs that invade our bodies and make them ill.

When Matthew gives this story he says there were two men who were demon possessed, while both Mark and Luke speak of only one man. Perhaps the reason why only one demoniac is mentioned in Mark and Luke is because he was the man who loved Jesus and served him. (Luke mentions that part of the story a little farther on, but Matthew does not mention it at all.)

Hence, the reason Mark and Luke only mention one man is because only one of them was worthy of being healed. Although Jesus healed them both (as reported in Matthew), Mark and Luke chose to only tell the story of the worthy man of the two.

Consider the different worthiness of people who were in the same situation, when Jesus spoke about preparing for the end of the world: **“Then two men will be in the field, one is taken, and one is left. Two women grinding at the mill, one is taken, and one is left. Watch therefore, because ye know not at what hour your Lord comes”** (Matthew 24:40-42). Apparently therefore, Mark and Luke did not consider the ungrateful demoniac worth mentioning.

The demon questions Jesus

- **And when he saw Jesus, having cried out, he fell down before him. And in a great voice he said, What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I beseech thee, do not torment me** (Luke 8:28).

Mark reports the demoniac saying, **“What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, do not torment me”** (Mark 5:7-8). And the record in Matthew says, **“What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?”** (Matthew 8:29).

The slight different in the wording (besides the “me” and “us” reference to the demon, which I explain in the next passage) is because each one gave only part of the demoniac’s words. They were all correct in what they reported. The differences were simply a matter of what each biographer chose to report. It is very common for people to use different words to report the same thing, even when they are reporting about what someone said.

Men are not inanimate devices that only record the sounds of things. When people report conversations, they usually remember what was said in terms of the message given and not the exact words that were uttered. It all depends upon what the reporter considers important. Let not scoffers lead you astray about such things.

Those demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God, but they wanted nothing to do with him. Demons are rebel spirits, and they want to live the unrestricted and wanton life of sin. Therefore, they reject God and his Son Jesus Christ. The world is filled with men with the same kind of spirit as those demons. They love the wanton life of sin, and have no love for God. Try rebuking the sins of any one of them and you will see how much they hate God and his righteousness.

What did those demons mean by being tormented before the time? They must have known that the world would end sometime, and that would be when they would be punished. However, they may not have believed it. How many sinners among men actually believe that after they die they will face the judgment of God to be punished? Those demons knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and they were afraid of God. But they had no love for him. They loved living in sin. Therefore, they chose to risk following the devil. We know very little about demons.

Those demons may have thought that Jesus was going to deprive them of their freedom to live independently of God. All sinners consider that to be torment. They consider God’s commands against sin to be a painful burden to them. Consider what the psalmist said about them: **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us”** (Psalm 2:1-3).

Sinners think God’s commands are bonds and cords to them. But we who believe in him and love him know that they are more like guardrails to protect us. They are also like the guide lines on highways, which are there to help guide us safely to our destination. God’s commands are all for our benefit, to light our way to the paths of life and productivity, even when those paths are sometimes hard to travel.

The demoniac was very wild

- **For he commanded the unclean spirit to come out from the man, for many times it had seized him. And he was bound with chains and shackles, and**

guarded. And breaking the bonds apart, he was driven by the demon into the desolate regions (Luke 8:29).

The fact that the demoniac was **“bound with chains and shackles”** was probably because the demon caused the man to be violent. The book of Acts gives an example of violence caused by an unclean spirit: **“And the man in whom was the evil spirit, leaping on them, and having overpowered them, he prevailed against them, so as for them to flee out of that house naked and wounded”** (Acts 19:16).

If you wonder why demons cause such violence in the men they possess, just consider all the senseless violence and vandalism committed by unruly young men. Evil spirits, whether of men or of demons, get a morbid pleasure out of destructiveness.

The demon's name

- **And Jesus demanded him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion, because many demons were entered into him. And they entreated him that he would not command them to go out into the abyss (Luke 8:30-31).**

Both Luke and Mark mention Jesus asking for the name of the demon. The demon said he was Legion because they were many. That tells why there is a mixing of the singular and the plural in referring to the unclean spirit, because one spoke for them all: **“What is with me and with thee?”** versus **“What is with us and thee?”**

The abyss is apparently a prison where evil spirits are kept until the great day of judgment. Peter spoke of a place of punishment until the judgment, when he said, **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into a place of punishment being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4).

The demons go into the swine

- **Now a herd of considerable swine was there feeding on the mountain, and they implored him that he would allow them to enter into those. And he allowed them. And the demons having come out from the man, they entered into the swine. And the herd stampeded down the slope into the lake, and were drowned (Luke 8:32-33).**

Those demons were even willing to be housed in a herd of swine rather than go out into the abyss. Nevertheless, even when Jesus allowed them, they were such vicious spirits that they immediately drove the swine to self-destruction. It is to the credit of the men that were possessed by them that they did not allow those demons to cause them to destroy themselves. Those men apparently had enough self-control to keep that from happening.

Now, it is reasonable to ask why would those demons destroy the swine when they knew it would mean having to go into the abyss? I can only surmise it was because those swine lacked enough power of self-preservation to keep those vicious spirits restrained enough to prevent their destruction. Or perhaps the swine became so alarmed by being possessed that they panicked and stampeded wildly, forcing those in front of them into the water

while the others blindly followed. The slope may also have had a sharp drop at the edge, making it more difficult to avoid falling. Whatever was the reason, it is obvious those demons did not want that to happen.

The people from the city ask Jesus to leave

- **And when those who tended them saw what happened, they fled and reported it in the city and in the fields. And they came out to see what happened. And they came to Jesus, and found the man, from whom the demons had gone out, sitting near the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And also those who saw it informed them how the man who was demon-possessed was saved.**
- **And the whole multitude of the region around the Gadarenes besought him to depart from them, because they were gripped by great fear. And he, having embarked into the boat, returned (Luke 8:34-37).**

It is amazing to me that those people besought Jesus to depart from their regions. Of course, they were no doubt filled with fear when they learned he had such power. They were probably also troubled at the death of all those swine, which represented a large financial loss to them. Jesus allowed that loss because those swine were unclean beasts that were dangerous to eat. He knew that, but they did not.

Mankind now knows how dangerous it is to eat such pork unless it is carefully cooked, because when they live in the countryside those animals are full of parasites. And those swine would probably have caused much disease and death from the infection of those who ate them. Jesus actually blessed those people by allowing those swine to be destroyed. There are even now many people in places like Africa who suffer many diseases because of things like unclean water, which they continually drink. They drink it from ignorance and unbelief, not believing it will harm them without disinfecting it.

The healed man obeys Jesus

- **But the man from whom the demons had gone out begged him to be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thy house, and relate everything God did for thee. And he departed, proclaiming throughout the whole city how many things Jesus did for him (Luke 8:38-39).**

Like some others who had been healed by Jesus, the former demoniac wanted to be with him. But Jesus commanded him to witness to his people what the Lord had done for him. Remember, Jesus usually commanded those he had healed to keep silent about it and not inform others, but that was when the healing was less public.

The healed man was very faithful in his obedience. And as a result all the men there marveled. They needed to marvel about Jesus, and be more receptive to his good news of salvation. Remember, they pleaded with Jesus to depart from their borders without even wanting to hear what he was teaching. Some of those people may have wanted him to

come back and teach them, but there is no record he ever did. They had their chance. And so it will be on the day of judgment for all who reject him in this life.

Jesus is asked to heal a ruler's daughter

- **And it came to pass during Jesus returning, the multitude welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And behold, there came a man whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And having fallen down near Jesus' feet, he besought him to come into his house, because there was with him an only begotten daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying (Luke 8:40-42)**

Matthew simply says the man was a ruler, while Mark was more specific, saying he was a synagogue ruler (see Mark 5:21-23). Mark also tells how the man fell at the feet of Jesus to plead with him for his daughter. According to Matthew the man said his daughter had just perished. While Mark said she had a terminal condition, and Luke he said she was dying.

Remember, the New Testament was written in Greek. And the Greek word for perished may also include the idea of imminent and certain death, especially if the person was comatose. In other words, for all practical purposes the person was dead. Actually, death is rarely instantaneous. That is why physicians can sometimes revive persons who are said to have died. True death can never be revived without a miracle. Nevertheless, that is just another trivial puzzle that is insignificant to the great value of the word of God.

Healing a woman with an issue of blood

- **But during his going the multitudes thronged him. And a woman being with an issue of blood for twelve years, who, although she spent her entire living on physicians, was unable to be healed by any, having come from behind, she touched the border of his garment. And immediately the issue of her blood stayed.**
- **And Jesus said, Who is he who touched me? But when they all denied, Peter and those with him, said, Master, the multitudes come together and crowd thee, and thou say, Who is he who touched me? But Jesus said, Who touched me? For I perceived power having gone forth from me.**
- **And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling. And having fallen down before him, she declared to him in the presence of all the people for what reason she touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said to her, Cheer up, Daughter. Thy faith has healed thee. Go in peace (Luke 8:43-48).**

That afflicted woman was so desperate for a cure that she spent her entire living on physicians, but she was unable to be healed by any of them. The kind of infirmity she suffered no doubt prevented her from doing many things, especially in public.

The law of Moses said that women with a flow of blood were unclean for seven days after the flow (see Leviticus 15:19). And whoever touched her also became unclean for the remainder of the day. However, being unclean that way simply restricted them from interacting with anything holy, such as at the tabernacle (or later the temple).

Luke tells how she was healed from the power that went forth from Jesus. And Jesus sensed that flow of power. Many teachers claim Jesus always knew everything, but that story is an example disproving their claim. For Jesus asked who touched him. Jesus had many limitations in his body of flesh. Regarding that power, Jesus told his apostles, **“The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). And those works of the Father included performing the miracles.

It is interesting that his disciples thought it strange that Jesus would ask who touched him. For they knew that the multitude was crowding him, and no doubt some had inadvertently touched his body. When Jesus asked who touched him, it was because he felt power come forth from him at that touch. And that power from the Father came forth from him because of the faith that afflicted woman had in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus blessed the woman for her faith in him. His disciples were apparently ignorant of how the power of God operated in him.

Restoring the life of the little girl

- **While he still spoke, some man comes from the synagogue ruler, saying to him, Thy daughter has died. Do not trouble the teacher. But having heard it, Jesus answered him, saying, Fear not, only believe and she will be saved.**
- **And when he came to the house, he did not allow any man to enter in except Peter and John and James, and the father of the girl and the mother. And all were weeping and bewailing her. But he said, Weep not. She did not die, but sleeps. And they ridiculed him, knowing that she died.**
- **But having sent them all away outside, having taken her by the hand, he called out, saying, Girl, awake. And her spirit returned, and she rose up immediately. And he commanded to give her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he ordered them to tell no man that which happened (Luke 8:49-56).**

Luke says the synagogue ruler was told his daughter had died. And the messenger gave him no hope she could be saved. Indeed, he even discouraged any more efforts by telling him not to trouble the teacher any longer. That makes me wonder if that messenger and those sent by him had any faith in Jesus to begin with. Nevertheless, the ruler did believe Jesus could save her. And Jesus strengthened that faith by telling him not to fear, but only believe.

Notice again how Jesus only selected Peter, John, and James to accompany him. Remember, there were several occasions mentioned in the New Testament record of those apostles being selected to go with him. Both Mark and Luke also say the girl's father and mother went with him.

Jesus commanded the girl be given to eat. She had probably been seriously ill for a long time, and had lost much weight because of it. Jesus had healed her of her illness completely, but no doubt he had not restored the weight she had lost. Therefore, Jesus wanted her to have the nourishment she needed for her body.

Jesus also commanded his parents to tell no man that which happened. The people had no faith in him, and even ridiculed him. So they did not deserve knowing what he had done. Beware lest your lack or weakness of faith in Jesus cause your knowledge of him to be limited.

Sending his apostles to preach and heal

- **And having summoned the twelve, he gave them power and authority over all demons, and to heal diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal those who were incapacitated. And he said to them, Take nothing for the way, neither staffs, nor bag, nor bread, nor silver, nor have two coats each (Luke 9:1-3).**

Jesus first gave his apostles power and authority over all demons, and to heal diseases. He did not send them out to preach the kingdom of God without having such proof that God was with them. What they taught about the kingdom of God was that it was coming, and the people needed to repent. Remember what Jesus said when he first began to preach: **“Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached”** (Matthew 4:17).

Notice how Jesus told them to take no extra provisions. However, here is what he said to them later, just before his trial and crucifixion: **“When I sent you without bag and pouch and shoes, did ye lack anything? And they said, Nothing. Then he said to them, But now, he who has a bag, let him take it, and likewise a pouch. And he who has no sword, let him sell his cloak and buy”** (Luke 22:35-36).

I once heard of some missionaries who boasted of taking no extra provisions with them, as the apostles had first done. They must not have noticed those last instructions Jesus gave. It is now foolish to make no preparations for such work, and it may even be seen as foolishly challenging God.

Those not receiving them

- **And into whatever house ye may enter, remain there, and from there depart. And as many as will not receive you, when departing from that city, also shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them.**
- **And having departed, they passed through the villages, preaching the good news, and healing everywhere (Luke 9:4-6).**

They were not to plead or persevere in places that rejected them, but were simply to shake off the dust from their feet as a sign to them they were rejected by God. And that should be our response to those who will not listen when we bring the good news of Christ to them. Jesus only persisted in reasoning with those who would listen to him, and he continued

trying to persuade them as long as they would listen. It is when they refuse us altogether that we are to shake off the dust of our feet, although not necessarily literally.

The good news that the apostles preached was that the kingdom of God was approaching. Therefore, the people needed to repent and pursue the righteousness of God, which is true righteousness. They healed everywhere they went as proof that they were from God. Now that we have the testimony of the New Testament the power of supernatural healing is not needed, and is no longer given. The Bible record itself is sufficient. Let no man deceive you by claiming supernatural powers, and/or teaching things contrary to what the Bible teaches.

Herod hears about Jesus

- **But Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him. And he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John was risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah appeared, and by others that a prophet, one of the ancient men arose. And Herod said, I beheaded John, but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him** (Luke 9:7-9).

Herod could not help hearing about Jesus, because of all the mighty works of healing that he was doing. Therefore, he wondered about him, and sought to see him. What the passage means by Herod seeking to see Jesus was that he sought to have Jesus come to him, although there is no record he ever sent anyone for him. Indeed, the record says farther on that Herod wanted to kill Jesus: **“In the same day some Pharisees came, saying to him, Get thee out and depart from here, because Herod wants to kill thee”** (Luke 13:31). But why would Herod want to kill Jesus? Perhaps Herod sent to request Jesus come to him, but Jesus refused. Or maybe it was a bluff to induce Jesus to come to him. There are all kinds of conjectures we can make about things in the Bible that are insignificant like this one.

The apostles return

- **And when the apostles returned, they related to him as many things as they did. And having taken them along, he withdrew in private into a desolate place of a city called Bethsaida. But the multitudes having known, they followed him. And having received them, he spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and he cured those who had need of healing** (Luke 9:10-11).

After that mission his apostles needed a time for rest, and Jesus sought a place for them to have some privacy. Jesus was always completely unselfish. And for the benefit of his apostles he sought to go into a desolate place for them to rest. Mark even says, **“... they had no opportunity even to eat”** (Mark 6:31).

Remember, because of his reputation as a healer, Jesus could not enter openly into a city (see Mark 1:45). Nevertheless, when the multitudes followed him he did not refuse them. And he did to them as he had commanded his apostles on their mission; he spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and he cured those who had need of healing.

Bethsaida was a city on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee, a few miles west of Capernaum.

Feeding five thousand men

- **And the day began to decline, and the twelve having come near, they said to him, Send the multitude away, so that, after going into the villages and fields around, they may rest and find provision, because we are here in a desolate place. But he said to them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, There are for us not more than five loaves and two fishes, unless, after going, we might buy food for all this people. For there were about five thousand men.**
- **And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down in groups of fifty each. And they did so, and made them all sit down. And after taking the five loaves and the two fishes, having looked up to heaven, he blessed them, and broke in pieces, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they ate, and were all filled (Luke 9:12-17).**

Jesus' disciples were concerned about the people's need to eat, because the time was late in the day. When they asked him to send the people out to the villages to purchase food, Jesus told his disciples to feed them. They knew it was impossible for them because they only had five loaves and two fishes. But as Jesus said about another occasion, **"With men, impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible"** (Mark 10:27). Therefore he prepared to feed them.

He first commanded the people to sit on the grass: **"And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down in groups of fifty each."** That served to better organize such a large multitude, and also make it better for cooking the fish. Having them in groups of fifty would have been a more convenient size for the many fires needed to cooking.

Mark's report differs somewhat about that. It says, **"And he commanded them to sit down, all by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties"** (Mark 6:39-40). The hundreds were no doubt simply pairs of groups, which would have been another level of organization, although not commanded by the Lord.

The fish were no doubt cooked before being eaten. That is indicated by this passage about a time Jesus appeared to some of his apostles after his resurrection: **"So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals set, and fish laying on it, and bread"** (John 21:9).

After the people were settled in the groups, Jesus prayed a blessing upon the loaves and fishes. Then he broke them in pieces for his disciples to distribute to the people. And the loaves and fishes that Jesus was given were not used up until there was enough to feed all the people.

There is a story in the Old Testament that is similar to that miracle, but of a much smaller degree. It involves the prophet Elisha, who is referred to in the passage as the man of God: **"And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the**

first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, Give to the people that they may eat.

And his servant said, What, should I set this before a hundred men? But he said, Give to the people that they may eat, for thus says Jehovah, They shall eat, and shall leave of it. So he set it before them, and they ate, and left of it according to the word of Jehovah” (Second Kings 4:42-44). Jesus fed fifty times more people with even less food that he was given.

No waste or litter

- **And there were taken up to them of the remaining fragments, twelve baskets** (Luke 9:17).

There was no waste of that surplus food, nor was any of it left behind as rubbish on the ground. It is sin to waste and litter, especially food. Americans greatly increased their waste and litter of food (and their containers) when they first forsook God to become pagan. That was obvious (and troubling) to me when I was living during that evil time.

Who men thought Jesus was

- **And it came to pass, as he was praying privately, the disciples were with him. And he questioned them, saying, Who do the multitudes say that I am? And having answered, they said, John the immerser, but others, Elijah, and others, that a certain prophet of the ancient men arose** (Luke 9:18-19).

God does not reveal himself to the world to make his existence obvious. He certainly could. He could make his existence even more obvious to the world than the sun is in the sky. He does not make his existence obvious to the world because he wants us to search for him.

When Paul was speaking to the Athenians, he told how God wants us to search for him: **“The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things.**

“And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us. For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring” (Acts 17:24-28).

Requiring us to grope for him to find him is one way he tests the character of our spirits. And the testing of the worthiness of our spirit is a major purpose of our existence in the world. Worthy souls will search to find God because they seek things higher and nobler than those of the world.

Therefore, Jesus did not publicly proclaim himself to be the Christ, the Son of God. Scoffers say he did not proclaim himself because he doubted who he was. They are liars who

deny the truth of the Bible record which says he did. They deny the truth of the word of God because they do not know God. Indeed, they do not want to know him, because they hate his ways.

Most of the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Christ. Some confused him with John the immerser. Some thought he was the reincarnation of a former prophet of God. But they all recognized him as a prophet. Most other men did not recognize him as the Christ because they had a misconception about what the Christ would be like. They expected the Christ of God, the Messiah, to be a great and mighty warrior-king who would bring Israel to greatness in the world. Jesus was nothing like that.

The true Christ of God came to establish a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God, not a kingdom of the world. As he said to Pilate the governor, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here”** (John 18:36).

Peter knew who he was

- **And he said to them, But ye, who say ye that I am? And having answered, Peter said, The Christ of God** (Luke 9:20).

Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God because of the evidence. For one thing, John the immerser testified who Jesus was: **“And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou wilt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God”** (John 1:32-34).

Peter not only believed the testimony of John, but he had seen other evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Indeed, as Jesus said, God the Father himself had testified about him. God revealed who Jesus was, not with words but with power. Peter and the other apostles had seen Jesus perform many mighty signs and wonders that could only have been done with the power of God.

Jesus mentioned God’s testimony of him to the Jews, when he said, **“But I have testimony greater than of John [the immerser], for the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me”** (John 5:36). It was not his flesh and blood—his physical appearance—that revealed who he was.

Nevertheless, it took great courage for Peter to confess Jesus as the Christ, because the Jews excommunicated from the synagogue every man who did, as this passage tells: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43). Therefore, it took great courage for any Jew to confess him.

Tell it to no man

- **But having chided them, he commanded to tell this to no man, saying, It is necessary for the Son of man to suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scholars, and be killed, and the third day to rise (Luke 9:21-22).**

Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim he was the Christ while he was still upon the earth. It was only after Jesus ascended into heaven that Peter used the “keys” that Jesus gave him to open the kingdom of God. It was then that he and the other apostles began to proclaim Jesus was the Christ. That is what Peter told the Jews during his first sermon: **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36).

Because the people completely misunderstood what the Christ would be like, Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim him. If he and his disciples had proclaimed he was the Christ, the people would have made him their earthly king. That is what the multitude tried to do after he fed five thousand men with only five barley loaves and two fishes. For the record says, **“When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone”** (John 6:14-15).

Jesus’ mission in the world was to prepare the people for the kingdom of God. And that kingdom was not established until he was resurrected into heaven. Publicly proclaiming he was the Christ would have interfered in many ways and prevented the fulfillment of God’s plans for him on the earth.

Therefore, Jesus would not allow his disciples to proclaim that he was the Christ. Only he had the duty, the right, and the power to proclaim he was the Christ, and he only did in private. Jesus only gave his disciples that duty, right, and power after he departed from the earth. When Jesus had earlier sent them out before him, it was for them to proclaim the kingdom was near, not that Jesus was the Christ.

Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his suffering and death by the rulers of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus also encouraged them by saying he would be raised the third day. Jesus knew how stressful that would be for them. Not only would it be a great challenge to their faith, but their lives would be in danger because of their association with him. For the Jewish rulers were vicious men who wanted to destroy them.

Losing our lives to save them

- **And he said to all, If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever may lose his life because of me, this man will save it (Luke 9:23-24).**

Jesus told those words about denying ourselves after he had rebuked Peter for opposing his death by the rulers of the Jews (see Matthew 16:23-24). Jesus said we must lose our

lives for his sake in order to find them. But of course, that does not mean we must all literally die. It means we must give up everything that is not part of his righteousness, everything that is selfish about us, everything that is an advantage to us in this world of sin.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all reported that Jesus qualified what he said about a man losing his life to find it. He said a man will save his life, if he will lose it because of him and the good news (see Matthew 10:39 and Mark 8:35). It is only by losing our lives for the cause of Christ and his good news that we will save it.

And remember, taking up our cross means enduring the trials and tribulations of living a faithful Christian life, regardless of what they may be. It means being longsuffering in our obedience to him. It means accepting whatever hardships we face in living for him and promoting his kingdom and his righteousness. Losing our lives that way enables us to find eternal life. For Jesus said to the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). That is truly finding life—for all who believe and obey him.

What is a man benefited

- **For what is a man benefited, having gained the whole world, but having lost or having forfeited himself?** (Luke 9:25).

Matthew quoted Jesus saying, **“For what does it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:26).

Forfeiting ourselves or losing our soul to gain the whole world is a very bad and foolish bargain. Remember what Solomon said about living in this world: **“I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind”** (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14). The very best we can have in this life is a few years of pleasure. And relative to eternity the longest life in this world is but a moment.

Indeed, as Jesus indicated, there is nothing so valuable that is worth losing our soul. Because for each one of us the most valuable thing we have is our soul, and the most valuable thing we could ever gain for it is eternal life. Every man will realize that on the day of judgment after this world is over. But for those who deny him in this life it will be too late.

And disobeying his commandments is denying him, regardless of what a man says with his lips. As the apostle John said, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man. But whoever keeps his word, truly in this man the love of God is fully perfected. By this we know that we are in him”** (First John 2:3-5).

Being ashamed of Jesus

- **For whoever may be ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of this man when he comes in his glory, and of the Father, and of the holy agents (Luke 9:26).**

There are many people during this spiritually decadent generation of Americans who are ashamed of Jesus. I never thought I would see how viciously and widely Jesus is now been attacked. And the sinful rulers of our government have given taxpayer money to finance some of the most blasphemous of those attacks.

It is even dangerous now for scientists, educators, corporate leaders, and many other people to confess their faith in him and his holy word. For they lose their reputations with their colleagues when they do. Even many of those who claim to believe what he taught are ashamed to confess it beyond the confines of their church. And if they find it convenient to claim him publicly, they limit themselves to only saying they believe. There are a few courageous souls who still honor and proclaim the truth about him publicly, but they are few in number because the truth of what he taught is so unpopular.

The kingdom was coming soon

- **But I tell you truly, there are some of those who stand here, who will, no, not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).**

Jesus was given his kingdom when he completed his sinless life in obedience to the Father. After his ascension into heaven his apostles established his church, which is the kingdom of God on the earth. Remember, Peter was given the keys to open its gates.

Jesus is transfigured

- **And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings that, after taking Peter and John and James, he went up onto the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face became different, and his clothing glistening white.**
- **And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah, who, having appeared in glory, spoke of his departure, which he was going to fulfill at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were weighed down with sleep, and having become awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.**
- **And it came to pass, as they were departing from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here, and we could make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah, not knowing what he was saying. And while he was speaking these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them.**

- **And they were afraid as they entered into the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son. Hear ye him. And at the occurrence of the voice, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and informed no man in those days any of the things that they have seen (Luke 9:28-36).**

The changed appearance of Jesus described in that passage is similar to how Jesus appeared in his heavenly glory to the apostle John in his vision of him: **“And his head and hair were white as wool, white as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire ...”** (Revelation 1:14).

The body of Jesus was temporarily transfigured on the mountain. But after his resurrection and ascension his transfiguration to a glorious body in heaven is permanent. And we too will be permanently transfigured when we (our spirits) are resurrected after this life is over. As Paul said, **“For our citizenship exists in the heavens, from which also we await a Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness, in order for it to become similar in form to the body of his glory, according to the working of his power even to subject all things to himself”** (Philippians 3:20-21).

Luke tells how Moses and Elijah also appeared in glory on the mountain. He also tells what they were saying to him: **“And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah, who, having appeared in glory, spoke of his departure, which he was going to fulfill at Jerusalem”** (Luke 9:30-31).

That means they spoke to him about his crucifixion and resurrection at Jerusalem. Jesus was going to fulfill those things because he prophesied they would happen. Those things were perhaps the greatest events that ever happened or will happen. They are so great because they enabled Jesus to defeat God’s enemies, and redeem the souls of all who love him. And that enabled God to achieve his goal of having many sons in heaven, sons who would always trust and obey him. For that seems to have been the reason God began to create things to begin with, things in heaven and on the earth.

There is an important lesson for us about the Old Testament in that story. Moses symbolized the law, and Elijah symbolized the prophets. And the law and the prophets symbolize the Old Testament. For example, when Jesus spoke what we call the golden rule, he said, **“All things therefore, as many as ye may want that men should do to you, so also do ye to them, for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12). In other words, that rule epitomizes the teachings of the Old Testament.

When Peter put Moses and Elijah equal with Christ, God spoke directly to tell him that Jesus was superior to all. For Jesus was God’s beloved Son, and what he taught supersedes the law and the prophets.

When the disciples heard the voice of God, they fell on their faces, and were afraid. It must have been a very awesome sound, perhaps like the sound of rolling thunder that was very near.

That was the second time the record tells how God spoke directly from heaven to say that he was well pleased with his beloved Son. The first time was when Jesus was immersed by John: **“And when Jesus was immersed, he went up straightaway out of the water. And lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like**

a dove, and coming upon him. And lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17).

Why Jesus only took Peter, John, and James with him on the mountain is not told. However, Paul did speak of them as being known as pillars (of the church), when he said, **“But from those who were reputed to be something (what kind they were formerly, it makes no difference to me, God does not accept a personage of man), for those who were of repute added nothing to me, but to the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the good news for men of uncircumcision, as Peter for men of circumcision (for he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles), and James and Cephas and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, when they understood the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship”** (Galatians 2:6-9).

Paul said that Peter, James, and John were reputed to be pillars. However, he also said that God does not accept a personage of man. Therefore, Peter, James, and John being pillars indicates they were considered by Jesus as being more worthy of recognition. And that would explain why he chose them to see his transfiguration.

His disciples could not heal a boy

- **And it came to pass, on the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, saying, Teacher, I beseech thee to look upon my son, because he is the only begotten to me. And lo, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out, and it convulses him with foaming. And it departs from him difficultly, injuring him. And I begged thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they could not** (Luke 9:37-40).

The man's son was apparently suffering some kind of epilepsy caused by a demon. While Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, John, and James, his other disciples attempted unsuccessfully to cast it out. Remember, they had successfully cast out demons when Jesus sent them out previously to proclaim the kingdom of God.

The story about the man's son is mentioned in the biography of Jesus by Mark: **“And having answered, one from the multitude said, Teacher, I brought my son to thee, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it tears him, and he foams, and gnashes his teeth, and becomes limp. And I spoke to thy disciples that they might cast it out, and they were not able”** (Mark 9:17-18).

It is also mention in the one by Matthew: **“And when they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling to him, and saying, Lord, be merciful to my son, because he is lunatic, and suffers badly. For he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not heal him”** (Matthew 17:14-16).

Both of those by Mark and Luke say the father blamed a spirit (an evil spirit) for his son's illness, while in the record by Matthew the father simply says the boy was lunatic. The story by mark also says the boy had a mute spirit.

The different biographies of Jesus provide a variety of information about his life. And that enables us to understand him better. For it is always better to examine anything from several different views or perspectives. The different testimonies also strengthen our faith that he was the Son of God. For the testimony of several men is always more powerful and convincing than the testimony of one.

Jesus rebukes that generation

- **And having answered, Jesus said, O faithless and perverted generation, how long will I be with you and endure you? (Luke 9:41).**

It is not clear why Jesus made that rebuke. He was certainly disappointed with the multitudes. For example, he once said to them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled”** (John 6:26). That was the day after he had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. He also said to the people of Jerusalem, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I wanted to gathered thy children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not”** (Matthew 23:37).

Perhaps that rebuke about the faithless and perverted generation was because his disciples also showed lack of faith. Jesus had such a powerful faith in his heavenly Father that he was no doubt deeply disappointed about how little faith even his chosen disciples had.

And I fear his rebuke can apply to all of us. Are we not all faithless and perverted compared with what we could be? I certainly feel that way. As Paul said, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23). There are countless ways I have fallen short of the glory of God. Yet I cannot brood about my past sins and failures. I must keep striving to do better.

The book of Mark also includes this dialogue between Jesus and the boy’s father: **“But if thou can do anything, help us, having compassion toward us.”** Jesus answered him, **“If thou are able to believe, all things are possible to him who believes. And straightaway the father of the child having cried out, he said with tears, I believe. Lord, help thou my unbelief”** (Mark 9:22-24).

The father’s strong emotional reaction shows how desperate he was for his son to be healed. And his plea could also be one for all of us: We believe. Lord, help thou our unbelief. Even though we believe, yet our faith is too often inadequate, containing elements of unbelief. Therefore, it is good for us to plead that the Lord will help us defeat whatever unbelief we have that remains to hinder us.

Jesus heals the boy

- **Bring thy son here. And as he was still coming, the demon tore him, and he convulsed. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father And they were all amazed at the majesty of God (Luke 9:41-43).**

Jesus earlier gave his apostles power over all demons, but they could not cast that one out. Matthew tells how his disciples came to him in private afterward, wanting to know why they could not cast it out. And Jesus explained it to them. See Matthew 17:18-21 for my comments about those things.

Jesus prophesies his death

- **But while all were wondering at all the things which Jesus did, he said to his disciples, Place ye these sayings into your ears, for the Son of man is going to be delivered up into the hands of men. But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they did not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying (Luke 9:43-45).**

Jesus often warned his disciples that he was going to be arrested. They never did understand, and they were afraid to ask him about it. That passage says it was concealed from them so that they did not perceive it. How it was concealed from them is not told. Therefore, all we can do is conjecture.

Perhaps it was concealed from them in the same way Jesus being the Christ was concealed from the Jews. The Jews, including his apostles, all expected the Christ to reign on a throne in Jerusalem. And since his disciples believed Jesus was the Christ, how could he be delivered into the hands of men? It made no sense to them.

Who is greater

- **But a thought entered among them, which of them may be greater. But having perceived the thought of their heart, having taken a child, Jesus stood it beside him, and he said to them, Whoever may receive this child in my name receives me, and whoever may receive me receives him who sent me, for he who exists smaller among you all, this man will be great (Luke 9:46-48).**

This and the next passage seem to be insertions, because they do not seem to fit the context. Such insertions, including those out of chronological order, are done in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Be not disturbed by them. Remember what John said at the end of his biography of Jesus: **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25). The record we have been given is just a sample of all that Jesus did.

What Jesus meant by receive is to accept favorably. And when we receive innocent children in the name of Christ, we are receiving him. And when we receive him we are receiving God. Therefore, we should never look down upon innocent children as merely weak and ignorant creatures, but as precious souls associated with Christ himself.

What Jesus meant by existing smaller among us was being humbler. The greater among us are those who are humbler. They have smaller opinions of themselves. They are those who

have no selfish ambitions, who realize and admit their failings and shortcomings, and who strive for the benefit of all.

Whoever is not against us is for us

- **And having answered, John said, Master, we saw a certain man casting out demons in thy name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us. But Jesus said to him, Do not forbid, for he who is not against us is for us (Luke 9:49-50).**

We should accept every man who works for righteousness, whether he is associated with us or not. Of course, if such a man is lacking knowledge or in error in some way, then it is our duty to help him. It is only when he refuses correction should we reject him. That was no doubt why casting out demons in Jesus' name did not always work. For example, consider this amusing story:

“But some of the wandering Jewish exorcists, attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And there were some sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, seven doing this. And having answered, the evil spirit said, I know Jesus and I recognize Paul, but who are ye? And the man in whom was the evil spirit, leaping on them, and having overpowered them, he prevailed against them, so as for them to flee out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:13-16).

The apostle Paul had been preaching the good news of Christ in Ephesus for a long time. Yet those seven wandering Jewish exorcists rejected his call to accept Jesus. Apparently all they wanted was to use the power of his name. Consequently, they failed and suffered for it. We should accept every man who is working for righteousness as long as he accepts Christ as well. And that was probably the case of the man whom John wrongfully forbade.

Notice how Jesus said, **“For he who is not against us is for us.”** Jesus also said, **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters”** (Matthew 12:30). Jesus often dichotomized mankind into (1) those who are humble and lowly, who love truth and righteousness, and who have open minds to learn, and (2) those who are proud and self-righteous, who love sin and deceit, and who close their minds to the teachings of his good news.

The first group Jesus called his sheep, and they will join with him and his disciples (when they learn of him). Those who are not his sheep work against him and his disciples, and they contribute to the unrighteousness of the world whether they are aware of it or not. Remember however, we all have the choice of belonging to Christ or rejecting him. And those who reject him can still repent and accept him while we have the opportunity in this life, but not in the next one.

Calling for fire from the sky

- **And it came to pass, while fulfilling the days for his ascension, that he also set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent agents before his face, and they went. And having gone, they entered into a village of Samaritans, so as to**

make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was going to Jerusalem.

- **And his disciples James and John having seen, they said, Lord, do thou want that we should call fire to come down from the sky, and consume them, as also Elijah did? But having turned around, he rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what kind of spirit ye are. For the Son of man came not to destroy the lives of men, but to save. And they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).**

The Samaritans were apparently very antagonistic about Jerusalem. That feeling probably had its roots in the division of the tribes of Israel after the reign of Solomon. Jeroboam became king of the separated ten northern tribes. He created idols for them to worship, and he changed their place of worship away from Jerusalem for fear the people would rejoin the tribe of Judah and kill him. Thus developed their tradition of worshiping away from Jerusalem. And that tradition remained among the mixed population that developed after the ten tribes of Israel were conquered and most of the people were scattered among foreign nations.

The story about Elijah calling fire down from the sky to consume men is told at the beginning of Second Kings. God had a very special reason for Elijah doing that. The men that were consumed were hostile soldiers sent by an evil king of Israel to take Elijah.

The story of that Samaritan village is another example of the kind of spirit Jesus had. He sought to save the lives of men by reconciling them with God. And he was very patient with those who rejected him. Indeed, the Jews who rejected him were not consumed until forty years after he began his ministry. God is very patient and longsuffering, but he will eventually vent his wrath against the unrepentant.

Those who would follow Jesus

- **And it came to pass while they went on the way, a certain man said to him, I will follow thee wherever thou may go, Lord. And Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky, nests, but the Son of man has not where he might lay his head.**
- **And he said to another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, allow me first, after departing, to bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but thou, after departing, proclaim the kingdom of God.**
- **And also another said, I will follow thee, Lord, but first allow me to bid farewell to those in my house. But Jesus said to him, No man, having put his hand to a plow, and looking to things behind, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:57-62).**

I have never heard a modern preacher discourage souls from following Jesus. They all promote the rewards of following him, but they say little if anything about the costs. Jesus did not want a large number of disciples that were not fully committed to him. He always

sought the most enthusiastic and dedicated. Therefore, he kept reminding them of the high costs of following him. That is one reason why the churches are now so weak. They are filled with half-hearted believers who fail to realize the cost of being a genuine disciple of Christ.

Regarding the disciple who wanted to go and bury his father, what he probably meant was he wanted to wait until his father died before following Jesus. That would explain why Jesus said he should leave the dead to bury their own dead. Jesus was referring to those who are spiritually dead. For when Paul was speaking about widows, he said, **“But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives”** (First Timothy 5:6). Therefore, since the man’s father apparently chose not to believe in Jesus, then Jesus could say he was spiritually dead.

In that passage Jesus called himself **“the Son of man.”** The word Adam means man. Hence, any son of Adam (any descendant) is a son of man. The expression son of man is used 197 times in the Bible, 109 of which are in the Old Testament. It is used most of all in the book of Ezekiel: 97 times, all of which were when Jehovah and his agents were addressing the prophet Ezekiel. The Bible records one time when an agent of heaven addressed the prophet Daniel that way.

The few other applications in the Old Testament of that expression refer to men in general. For example, the book of Jeremiah uses that expression four times; each one preceded with the word any: “any son of man.”

That expression was also used a few times in the Old Testament when referring to the Son of God. For example, it was used that way in this psalm: **“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou have ordained, what is man that thou remember him? And the son of man that thou succor him? For thou have made him but little lower than agents, and crowned him with glory and honor. Thou make him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou have put all things under his feet”** (Psalm 8:3-6).

The author of the book of Hebrews quoted that passage of the psalm when he was speaking about the Son of God: **“But a certain man has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou remember him? Or a son of man, that thou help him? Thou made him a little something less than the agents. Thou crowned him with glory and honor. Thou subordinated all things under his feet. For in subordinating all things to him, he left nothing not subordinate to him. But now we do not yet see all things subordinated to him”** (Hebrews 2:6-8).

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man 83 times in the New Testament. The few other times the expression is used in the New Testament refer to men, such as “a son of man.” Jesus even used it that way when he was referring to himself: **“For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man”** (John 5:26-27).

By calling himself the Son of man or a son of man, Jesus emphasized the fact that even though he was the Son of God, he was a man. He became a man like us so that he could save our souls. And now he will always be a son of man, just as he will always be the Son of God. And by becoming our Redeemer he gave us the fabulous opportunity to become a brother to him in heaven as sons of God.

Jesus discouraged each of those three men from following him, because he always demanded total commitment. Remember what he said about those whom we love: **“He who loves father or mother above me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter above me is not worthy of me”** (Matthew 10:37). Jesus did not want to fill the kingdom of God with multitudes of people just for the sake of numbers. He wanted, and will always want, the few who are totally committed to him, and are willing to make every sacrifice for him.

Regarding the man who wanted to bid farewell to those in his house, what Jesus probably meant by not looking to things behind was having a longing for how we lived before following him. No man can commit himself fully to Jesus and his cause if he harbors regrets about it. We should never want to go back to the time before we committed ourselves to him. For Jesus said that those who do so are unfit for the kingdom.

Dear reader, if you think what Jesus demands is cruel and unreasonable, then you are not fit for the kingdom of God. Nor do you really understand what it means to be his disciple and what great rewards await us in the afterlife. For Jesus sacrificed everything for us, including his very life, for our soul’s salvation so that we can become sons of God for eternity. And as Paul said, **“For our slight momentary affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory from extraordinariness to extraordinariness, while we look not at things seen, but at things not seen. For things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal”** (Second Corinthians 4:17-18).

Sending seventy men to go before him

- **Now after these things the Lord also appointed seventy other men, and sent them by twos before his face into every city and place where he himself was going to come** (Luke 10:1).

Notice how Jesus sent them out in pairs. When Jesus had earlier sent out his twelve apostles, the record in Matthew does not say he gave them instructions about working together, but the record in Mark says he did: **“And he summons the twelve, and began to send them forth in pairs”** (Mark 6:7). There are many reasons why it is always best to evangelize in pairs. It gives better protection; it gives greater credibility; it allows mutual encouragement.

John the immerser was only one man, and he testified about Jesus. However, the people went out to him, he did not go to them. For John had developed a good reputation among the people. But since the seventy had no such reputation, they needed to go out in pairs to strengthen their testimony to the people. Moreover, sending them out would enable many more to hear the good news of Christ, because no doubt many people were unable to go to hear John.

In the above passage Luke does not say that the seventy were given special powers as were the twelve apostles. However, a little farther on he does show how they were given those powers. They were needed then to prove that Jesus was the Son of God, but they are no longer given because they are no longer needed. The testimony of the New Testament is sufficient for those whose hearts are right; they will believe because of that testimony alone.

Notice how Jesus did not send out any women to evangelize. There were no doubt many women who were as knowledgeable of his good news of salvation, and were available to go out. Nevertheless, they were not qualified to be evangelists because they were women. There is no record in the Bible of any woman being an evangelist of Christ, although some women were prophets and some of them helped their husbands teach other men privately. God's will is that women in his kingdom have a role like enlisted men in the army compared with that of officers: always subordinate and limited in their functions.

The harvest and the workmen

- **Therefore he said to them, The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the workmen are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth workmen into his harvest (Luke 10:2).**

Jesus referred to the people as crops ripe for harvest. There are times and places where the people are very receptive to the good news of Christ, while there are other times and places where their hearts are so hardened that few souls can be harvested. Whenever and wherever the people are receptive to the good news of Christ, there is a need for more workmen to evangelize. They are needed because God uses us in the work of saving souls.

Notice how Jesus said to those seventy men they should pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth workmen into his harvest. In this case the Lord of the harvest was Jesus himself who sent those workmen out into his harvest. But now the Spirit of Christ is the Lord of the harvest that arouses men to work in his harvest. And that is done when the harvest is plentiful. Disciples of Christ are most aroused to proclaim his good news of salvation when people are receptive to it.

Lambs among wolves

- **God ye. Behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves (Luke 10:3).**

This world is filled with men having the heart of wolves because they prey upon the weak and vulnerable. We cannot avoid all of such men, because most of them go about in sheep's clothing. That was what Jesus said about false prophets: **"But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves"** (Matthew 7:15). The predatory wolves of men are not limited to false prophets. They can be virtually anywhere.

Matthew reported this advice that Jesus gave when he spoke about his disciples being lambs in the midst of wolves: **"Become ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves"** (Matthew 10:16). Therefore, heed Jesus' advice to not only be gentle sheep, but become wise as serpents and innocent as doves. That is the best way to protect and defend yourself against them. Being wise as serpents means knowing how to protect yourself and perform effectively in this dangerous world. And the only way to become truly wise is to study the word of God.

Not only should we become wise as serpents, but Jesus said we should be innocent as doves. Doves are completely harmless to us. What man is so foolish as to fear doves? And

people should be that way toward us as children of God. They should have no reason to fear us. We should always be completely harmless and trustworthy.

Appropriate conduct for them

- **Carry no bag, no pouch, no shoes, and greet no man on the way. And into whatever house ye enter, first say, Peace to this house. And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him, and if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house eating and drinking from their things, for the workman is worthy of his wage. Do not depart from house to house.**
- **And into whatever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat the things that are set before you. And heal the weak in it, and say to them, The kingdom of God has come near to you (Luke 10:4-9).**

Those commands are wise instructions for how they should conduct themselves. They were not to shift from house to house while they remained in a city. They were to remain in the one that first offered to freely lodge and feed them. They would deserve such provisions because of the knowledge they would proclaim, plus the great services they would give to the weak and needy of the city. And being lodged and fed was a minimum recompense, even for the blessing of peace they would call upon the house where they would stay.

Regarding money, Matthew reports Jesus saying this to his apostles when he sent them out: **“Freely ye received, freely give”** (Matthew 10:8). Neither Jesus, nor any of his apostles, nor any evangelist ever sought or received any kind of financial aid from those they healed. The modern faith healers are not only frauds and liars, but they emphasize getting much money from the people. Most of them have become millionaires because of it. There have been many books written to expose their evils and their deceitful claims.

I have no doubt they are all going to be severely punished in the fires of hell of the next life. Never be deceived by their charm, by their seductive words, or by their clever trickery. Those supernatural powers were only given before the New Testament was written. For their purpose was to show who was speaking the truth of God and who was not. But now we have the testimony of the complete Bible to see who is speaking the truth of God and who is not. For it is the word of God, and that is our standard for judging.

The command for his apostles to eat whatever was set before them would not be too difficult, because Jesus said, **“Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6). Therefore, they would only have food that was lawful for them, not any of the strange kinds of foods that some Gentiles eat.

Those not receiving them

- **But into whatever city ye enter, and they will not receive you, after departing into the thoroughfares of it, say, Even the dust that clings on us from your city, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know ye this, that the**

kingdom of God has come near to you. I say to you, that it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city (Luke 10:10-12).

They were not to plead or persevere in places that rejected them, but were simply to wipe off the dust from their feet as a sign to them they were rejected by God. And that should be our response to those who will not listen when we bring the good news of Christ to them. Jesus only persisted in reasoning with those who would listen to him, and he continued trying to persuade them. It is when they refuse us altogether that we are to let them know that because they rejected the kingdom God for themselves, they are rejected by God.

Jesus then told his disciples how those who would not receive them would be judged more severely in the day of judgment at the end of the world, **“in that day.”** Hence, what he said is further evidence of degrees of punishment in the afterlife.

Regarding Sodom, Jehovah had visited with Abraham, and as he was departing, he said to him, **“Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which comes to me. And if not, I will know”** (Genesis 18:20-21).

Jehovah sent two of his heavenly agents to investigate those places. Not long after their arrival the men of Sodom tried to rape them homosexually. Those agents used their supernatural powers to escape, and then brought Abraham’s righteous nephew Lot out of the city with them. After that the record says, **“Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground”** (Genesis 19:24-25).

Rebuking cities that refused him

- **Woe to thee, Chorazin! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! Because if the mighty works were done in Tyre and Sidon, which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which was exalted to the sky, will be thrust down to Hades (Luke 10:13-15).**

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were cities just north of the Sea of Galilee, and they were within a few miles of each other. Hence, what was done in one of them was soon known in the others.

Tyre and Sidon are mentioned many times in the Old Testament. They were both seaport cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea that became rich from commerce. They were about thirty miles northwest of the sea of Galilee, and were about twenty miles apart. Although very prosperous they became morally corrupt, which turned God against them, as show in these passages:

Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for

the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken it, says the lord Jehovah. And she shall become a spoil to the nations, and her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword. And they shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 26:3-6).

Son of man, set thy face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, Thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Sidon. And I will be glorified in the midst of thee. And they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets. And the wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword upon her on every side. And they shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 28:21-23).

Chorazin and Bethsaida were apparently very prosperous, being **“exalted as far as the sky.”** However, those ancient cities are now in ruins. And the inhabitants of those cities were truly **“brought down as far as Hades,”** which is the abode of the dead. Apparently the spirits of unrighteous souls reside there until the day of judgment.

What Jesus said about Tyre and Sidon clearly teaches there will be degrees of tolerance in the day of judgment. And for those cities greater tolerance means less severe punishment. Jesus gave an example of different degrees of punishment when he told a parable about bondmen serving an absentee lord. He said, **“And that bondman who knew his lord’s will, and who did not prepare, nor do according to his will, will be beaten much, but he who did not know, and did things worthy of blows, will be beaten little”** (Luke 12:47-48). How that difference in punishment will happen in the afterlife is never told. We can only conjecture, which is what I do in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The greater severity for those Jewish cities was because mighty works had been done in them, mighty miracles providing proof that Jesus was from God. However, they would not believe him, even having seen those mighty works, because of the hardness of their hearts. Remember, the devil has even spoken with God in heaven, yet he remains his enemy. And many of the human disciples of the devil have that same kind of spirit. It is impossible to convert them.

Hearing and rejecting

- **He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me (Luke 10:16).**

Those words were spoken to the seventy disciples that Jesus sent out to prepare the people in every city and place where he was coming. The lesson for us is that when we proclaim the genuine good news of Jesus Christ it is the same as if Jesus himself were proclaiming it. For whoever listens to us when we proclaim those words, is listening to Jesus because we proclaim him not ourselves. And when we are rejected for proclaiming him, they are not rejecting us, but Jesus himself.

Regarding people’s rejection of God, Samuel was the last judge over Israel before the time of the kings. Here is what the record says when the people first demanded a king of him: **“Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel to**

Ramah. And they said to him, Behold, thou are old, and thy sons do not walk in thy ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us.

“And Samuel prayed to Jehovah. And Jehovah said to Samuel, Harken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, in that they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also to thee” (First Samuel 8:4-8).

The people had not rejected Samuel, but Jehovah. And when people reject us who proclaim the good new of Christ, they are not rejecting us, but Christ. And whoever rejects Christ rejects God.

Satan falling as lightning

- **And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are made subject to us in thy name. And he said to them, I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from the sky. Behold, I give you authority to tread over serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and, no, nothing will harm you** (Luke 10:17-19).

What did Jesus mean by saying he beheld Satan fallen as lighting from the sky? He was saying that the mighty works done by those seventy disciples resulted in the devil losing power to afflict us, at least during that time.

The Bible tells how Satan oppresses us, because when Peter was preaching to Cornelius the centurion, among his words, he said, **“The word that he sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching good news, peace by Jesus Christ (this man is Lord of all), ye know, the word having occurred throughout the whole of Judea beginning from Galilee after the immersion that John preached— Jesus of Nazareth—how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who passed through doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him”** (Acts 10:36-38).

It is the devil who oppresses the righteous with afflictions. And God gave those seventy men the power to defeat that oppression (wherever they found it). That must be what Jesus meant by Satan fallen as lightning from the sky. Fallen as lightning symbolized taking away his power to afflict. Of course, that only meant Satan lost his power with those seventy and the ones they had healed. For he continues with that power, and he will continue as long as he is free to roam the earth. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Regarding the matter of men sent by Jesus treading over serpents and scorpions without being hurt, the apostle Paul is a good example. He was shipwrecked on the island of Malta when he was being take to be tried before Caesar. Here is part of that story: **“And the foreigners presented uncommon kindness to us, for, having kindled a fire, they received us all because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And Paul having gathered**

a quantity of sticks, and having placed them on the fire, a viper having come out from the heat, it fastened on his hand.

“And when the foreigners saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to each other, Certainly this man is a murderer, whom, though saved from the sea, Justice did not allow to live. Indeed therefore having shaken off the creature into the fire, he experienced nothing harmful. But they expected he was going to swell up, or suddenly fall down dead, but when they were long expecting, and seeing nothing amiss happening to him, thinking differently, they declared him to be a god” (Acts 28:2-6).

Nevertheless, Paul and the other apostles still suffered harm from persecutions.

Names written in the heavens

- **Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are made subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in the heavens (Luke 10:20).**

Jesus had given those seventy disciples the power to cast out demons. And when they returned they rejoiced about having had that power. However, our greatest source of joy should be that our names are written in the heavens, in the book of life there. For the book of Revelation says about the day of judgment, **“And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).**

Hidden to some, revealed to others

- **In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, and said, I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight (Luke 10:21).**

Notice how the passage says that Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit. Jesus had emotions, but his expressions of them were always very subdued, whether in joy, sorrow, or anger. And he never let his emotions control him. The world has this foolish myth that emotion contrasts with intellect. The truth is they complement each other. Our feelings and emotions energize us. Our emotions are necessary to arouse us to action, because without them we would be lethargic. That is why the word is e-motion. Emotion moves us.

Nevertheless, we should never be controlled by our emotions. The behavior aroused by them should always be controlled by our intellect. Our emotions are like the engine that propels a car. The engine should never control the car, but without it the car goes nowhere. Of course, controlling our emotions is not always easy, especially when they are strong. Nevertheless, the expressions of our emotions should always be appropriate, whether they are weak or strong.

It is not the rich and powerful, nor the wise and intelligent, that are strong in their trust in God. It is the humble and lowly in heart. What Jesus meant by “these things” that were hidden seems to refer to understanding the ways of salvation. God has made the good news of Christ such that only the humble and lowly are able to accept it. A man’s pride keeps his eyes closed to the truth, as Paul said, **“For since in the wisdom of God the**

world did not know God through its wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe" (First Corinthians 1:21).

The eyes of proud men see the good news of Christ as foolishness. And in that way salvation is given only to those who are childlike, humble and lowly in spirit. God only wants such to become his sons for eternity. Indeed, that is the kind of heart his only begotten Son Jesus Christ has. Therefore, God hides those things from the wise and intelligent; that is, the great majority of them.

God has given everything to his Son

- **And having turned to the disciples, he said, All things were delivered to me by my Father** (Luke 10:22).

Several times Jesus told how God the Father has given everything to his Son. For example, during the last supper with his apostles, Jesus said to them, **"All things, as many as the Father has are mine"** (John 16:15). When Jesus said all things, he meant everything, all things both in heaven and on earth. Moreover, just before he ascended into heaven, he said to his disciples, **"All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me"** (Matthew 28:18). I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Knowing the Son and the Father

- **And no man knows who the Son is, except the Father, and who the Father is, except the Son, and he to whomever the Son wants to reveal him** (Luke 10:22).

Knowing someone is more than just having seen them. Knowing involves having knowledge about them. And what Jesus may have meant in the above passage by knowing, is knowing in the heavenly sense. For no man except Jesus has that kind of knowledge of God, nor does any man have that kind of knowledge about Jesus in his heavenly nature. Yet Jesus did say that he could reveal that kind of knowledge about God. And I think what he meant was that Jesus has the power to give us eternal life in heaven with God where we can truly know him as his sons for eternity.

We cannot yet know God in that sense, but we can know some things about him. For Jesus said elsewhere, **"No man has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, being in the bosom of the Father, that man reported him"** (John 1:18). We can know much about the character of God from what Jesus has reported. And that was from both what he taught and how he lived. For knowing Jesus is knowing God. As Jesus said to his apostles, **"He who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9).

Seeing and hearing extraordinary things

- **And having turning toward the disciples in private, he said, Blessed are the eyes that see what ye see. For I say to you, that many prophets and kings desired to see what ye see, and did not see, and to hear what ye hear, and did not hear** (Luke 10:23-24).

Those men were seeing and hearing things that were truly extraordinary. We can look back now and see how extraordinary those things were. But the people who were living during those days did not realize it because he seemed to be just a poor wandering preacher with the ability to heal people. Jesus spoke those words to his disciples to help them appreciate what they were experiencing.

People rarely appreciate the blessings they enjoy during their lives because we have so many sorrows as well. And that was true of the people who lived during the time of Christ. They did not appreciate the extraordinariness of those days because Jesus lived in such a humble way, and he was rejected by most of the people of Israel.

Inheriting eternal life

- **And behold, a certain lawyer stood up testing him, and saying, Teacher, having done what, would I inherit eternal life? And he said to him, What is written in the law? How read thou?**
- **And having answered, he said, Thou shall love the Lord thy God from thy whole heart, and from thy whole soul, and from thy whole strength, and from thy whole mind, and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said to him, Thou answered correctly. Do this and thou will live (Luke 10:25-28).**

Jesus gave that lawyer the same answer about inheriting eternal life that he gave to the rich young ruler (see Matthew 19:16-19). After the lawyer told him what was the essence of the law, Jesus said he would live if he obeyed. Our faith alone does not save us. Our faith saves us by causing us to obey, and our obedience is what saves us. It saves us by our receiving the grace of God, because no man can earn salvation.

The book of Revelation tells how we are all going to be judged by our works: **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And they were judged, each according to their works”** (Revelation 20:12-13).

Who is my neighbor

- **But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And having replied, Jesus said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And he encountered bandits, who also, having stripped him and having beat him, departed having left him being half dead. And by coincidence a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise also a Levite who happened upon the place, having come, and having looked, passed by on the other side.**
- **But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to him, and when he saw him, felt compassion. And having come, he wrapped up his wounds,**

pouring on olive oil and wine. And having set him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when departing, after taking out two denarii, he gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Take care of him, and whatever thou might spend more, I will repay thee at my return.

- **Which therefore, of these three, appears to thee to have become neighbor to the man who fell among the bandits? And he said, He who did mercy with him. Therefore Jesus said to him, Go, and do thou likewise (Luke 10:29-37).**

Typical of a lawyer's mentality, the man wanted Jesus to be more specific about his meaning of neighbor in that command. Instead of giving him some scholarly definition, Jesus gave him an example of what the word meant. Such illustrations are much more meaningful.

The man who was helped in that parable was not a bandit, nor was he any other kind of wicked or foolish man. He was an innocent man in desperate need that was caused by circumstances beyond his control. In a situation like that the right thing for us to do is use our time and our resources to rescue such a man. And as Jesus had commanded earlier, we are not to worry about being recompensed by him. God will recompense us much more in his own good time and way.

Nevertheless remember, we must use wisdom in doing such things. For the world is now very different from what it was then. For example, in America there are now professional emergency workers who continually standby prepared to come to assist anyone who would have that kind of need. Therefore, unless there is something we can do before those workers arrive, it is better to simply make sure they are on the way to help.

And there are many other kinds of situations where we must use our discretion about what and how we respond to those who need help. The principle of what Jesus taught in that parable is that we must not ignore or neglect doing what we can when it is needed in such emergencies.

Martha and Mary

- **And it came to pass as they went, he also entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she was sister to this woman called Mary, who also, having sat at Jesus' feet, was listening to his word. But Martha was encumbered about much serving.**
- **And having stood near, she said, Lord, do thou not care that my sister left me behind to serve alone? Speak to her therefore that she may help me. But having answered, Jesus said to her, Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary, and Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:38-42).**

Martha had complained to Jesus that her sister Mary was spending her time listening to Jesus instead of helping her prepare the meal. Jesus gently chided Martha and told her

what was really important. Nothing else is said about that occasion, but I would like to conjecture about what may have transpired. I suspect Martha sat down with Mary and also listened to Jesus, because she was a good and humble woman. And I also suspect the meal was satisfactorily prepared even in her absence. Perhaps it was similar to how Jesus provided extra wine for a wedding when the humble hosts did not have enough (see John 2).

Martha and Mary had a brother named Lazarus. The biography of Jesus by John tells much more about those righteous souls (see John 11-12).

Praying

- **And it came to pass as he was in a certain place praying, that when he ceased, a certain man of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples.**
- **And he said to them, When ye pray, say, Our Father in the heavens, hallowed be thy name. May thy kingdom come, may thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven. Give us our bread sufficient for each day. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive every man who is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Luke 11:1-4).**

That is very similar to the prayer Jesus gave for his disciples during his sermon on the mount, which is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus preached and taught his lessons at many different times and places. That prayer is no doubt an example of when he taught the same thing to different people.

That particular prayer has come to be called “the Lord’s prayer.” Notice how brief it is. There seems to be a human tendency to make long prayers in public, but the Lord’s prayer was brief and concise.

Nevertheless, long prayers are not necessarily condemned, because there are times when they are appropriate. An example of a long prayer is the one Jesus made during the time of the last supper with his apostles (see John 17). The example of a prayer that Jesus gave in the above passage is only sixty words long, while his prayer during the last supper was six hundred and fifty-two words long, ten times longer.

There are six parts to the Lord’s prayer in the above passage, which I list below:

- Our Father in the heavens, hallowed be thy name.**
- May thy kingdom come,**
- may thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven.**
- Give us our bread sufficient for each day.**
- And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive every man who is indebted to us.**
- And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

To hallow means to honor as sacred. That is one reason why one of the ten commandments forbade taking God’s name in vain: **“Thou shall not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain”**

(Exodus 20:7). Taking God's name in vain is very common in this most adulterous generation of Americans. They use it as a common expletive. But that is making them guilty before God, and he will punish them. Beware lest the evil habits of the world cause you to become guilty before God.

Jesus prayed that God's kingdom would come. That has now happened. It came when Peter preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. That was the day the church—the kingdom of God—was established. Hence, it is foolish for people to recite the Lord's prayer with that part in it. Jesus did not command us to pray that prayer. He said, **“Pray ye therefore this way:”** Which means to pray similar to that prayer, not exactly like it.

Jesus prayed that the will of God happen on the earth as it is in heaven. God's will is done in heaven because he does not tolerate sin there. Peter gave evidence of that, when he said, **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into a place of punishment being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4). If mankind wants to make the world more like heaven, then they need to obey the will of God as is done in heaven.

God is tolerating sin in this world because he is testing our souls to choose those who make themselves worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven. He is separating the sheep from the goats; he is separating the wheat from the chaff; he is choosing those who prove they have genuine faith in him and love for him from those who do not.

We all need regular nourishment from the things we eat. And except during times of fasting, we almost always eat more than once each day. Each day we need the bread sufficient for us, bread referring to any kind of nutritious food. And we need to keep reminding ourselves that God is he who supplies that food. Men have yet to invent artificial foods that can sustain our bodies. We cultivate the land, we plant and care for the crops, we harvest and process them, but God is he who causes the plants to grow, and that is the hardest part, impossible for us.

Regarding our debts to God, we owe our very lives to him, as well as the world itself. He created them all. However, in his prayer quoted above, Jesus is referring to the debts we make when we sin against God. You see, every sin creates harm of some kind, more or less, sooner or later. And that requires just recompense, which is the debt we create when we sin. Jesus told us to ask God to forgive our debts to him in the same way we also forgive the debts of those who sin against us. I say much more about forgiveness in my comments about what Jesus says about it farther on.

Jesus also told us to ask that God not bring us into temptation but deliver us from evil. It is inevitable that we are going to face temptations and evils. However, we should never seek situations where we will be tempted or experience evil. It is foolish to expose yourself unnecessarily to things that will tempt you or cause evil to you. Instead, we should ask God to help us avoid temptations and evils. And then let him decide when it would be good if we faced those things. But when that happens, follow the steps of Jesus and resist the best way you can, asking God to help you endure.

Whenever you can, be like Joseph the son of Jacob, and flee temptation. Joseph's sinful brothers sold him into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and became a slave to an officer of Pharaoh. Here is the story of how Joseph was tempted by that officer's wife: **“And it**

came to pass, after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said to his master's wife, Behold, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand. He is not greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

“And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not hearken to her, to lie by her, or to be with her. And it came to pass, about this time, that he went into the house to do his work, and there was none of the men of the house there inside. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got out” (Genesis 39:7-12).

Afterward, in a rage the woman falsely accused him, and so her husband cast Joseph into prison. Yet he still kept his faith in God. And eventually, after several years in prison, God raised Joseph to be the second in command of all Egypt. The story of Joseph is one of the most inspiring in the Bible.

The only words in the Lord's prayer given in Matthew that are not included in this one are these at the end of it: **“... because from thee is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Truly.”**

Persist in prayer requests

- **And he said to them, Which of you will have a friend, and will go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, since a friend arrived from the road to me, and I do not have what I would set before him, and that man from inside, having answered, would say, Do not cause toils for me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I am not able, after getting up, to give thee?**
- **I say to you, though he will not give him, after getting up, because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, having awoken, he will give him as many as he needs** (Luke 11:5-8).

That example of asking is part of his lesson about praying. And the moral of that story is that we should persist with our requests to God. For if a man will comply with a honorable request when it is made with persistence, then God certainly will. Nevertheless, all of our requests should be according to his will. That means asking for things that are good and right and just, and wise for us.

And if for some reason God does not comply with what we ask, then we must assume it is not something that would be good for us. Because Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

Making our requests to God

- **And I say to you, ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and ye will find. Knock, and it will be opened. For every man who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**
- **And which father of you, if the son will ask a loaf, will give him a stone, or also if a fish, in place of a fish will give him a serpent? Or if he should ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?**
- **If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more the Father from heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? (Luke 11:9-13).**

What Jesus meant by asking, seeking, and knocking was to earnestly strive to obtain things that are good; whether things mental or material. And those who earnestly strive to obtain are those who do obtain. They obtain eventually—if they persevere. And that was what Jesus was teaching. Of course, God expects us to ask, seek, and knock with the methods of righteousness, and not sinfully.

Consider the example of seeking wisdom. For James said, **“And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”** (James 1:5-8). Remember however, all wisdom comes with time and labor. Think not that God will give anything to you miraculously. We must work together with him. And as we struggle and strive righteously he will bless us.

Notice above how Jesus emphasized that God knows how to give good gifts to us. And like a father to his children, he wants to give good things to us. And notice how James also spoke about how God gives generously. Nevertheless, there are some things people ask and seek that God will not provide. Like a father with his children, he knows best what we should have, and what is best for us.

Accused of being of Beelzebub

- **And he was casting out a demon, and it was mute. And it happened when the demon was gone out, the mute man spoke. And the multitudes marveled, but some of them said, He casts out the demons by Beelzebub, ruler of the demons. And others, challenging, sought from him a sign from the sky.**
- **But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, Every kingdom that was divided against itself is made desolate, and a house against a house falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom be made to stand? Because ye say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebub.**

- **And if I cast out the demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Because of this they will be your judges. But if by a finger of God I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you** (Luke 11:14-20).

The text says that the multitudes marveled when Jesus healed the mute man by casting out the demon that had possessed him. However, the Pharisees, because they hated Jesus, they immediately uttering an evil accusation against him. For in their eyes nothing he did was right. Even doing such a compassionate deed as casting out demons was condemned by them as being from the devil. For Beelzebub is another name for Satan, the ruler of the demons. And the devil, being the chief accuser against the righteous, those disciples of the devil falsely accused Jesus that way.

Nevertheless, as Jesus always did, he exposed the absurdity of their charge. He reminded them how organizations cannot stand when they are divided against themselves. Their charge against Jesus was like accusing the police of being crime bosses because they were able to stop criminals.

Jesus also turned their accusation against them by asking by whom their sons cast out demons. According to their logic, if Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebub, then their sons were doing the same thing. Therefore, their own sons would rebuke them for making such a foolish argument.

Notice how Jesus said that if it was by the finger of God that he cast out demons, then the kingdom of God had come upon them. By proving the falsity of their accusation, that meant his power could only be from God. Hence, that was proof that God sent him to proclaim the kingdom of God. When Jesus said it was by the finger of God that he cast out demons, that was to show how casting out demons required very little of the power of God.

Notice also how Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom. The book of Revelation describes Satan's kingdom, but in very figurative language. I say much more about Satan's kingdom and his war with God in my commentary of Revelation, and in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

I speak more about their accusation that he cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub in my commentary of Matthew 12:22-27, which tells the same story.

This passage from Luke also says, **“And others, challenging, sought from him a sign from the sky.”** Jesus had been giving them many mighty signs by all the great miracles of healing he was doing in their sight. But they absolutely refused to accept that kind of testimony, and demanded some spectacular sign from the sky. The testimony Jesus was giving was the very best kind. For it was not only clear proof he was from God, but it was also practical and compassionate toward the needy.

Plundering goods of strong men

- **When the fully armed strong man guards his palace, the things possessed by him are in peace, but when a stronger than he comes, after defeating**

him, he takes away his full armor in which he trusted, and divides his booty (Luke 11:21-22).

When Jesus gave the example of plundering the goods of a man's house, he was certainly not justifying indiscriminate plunder. Nevertheless, when one nation wants to plunder another one it must first defeat that nation. When a wicked man wants to plunder an innocent man's house, he must first disarm that man.

When righteous men want to plunder a wicked man's house, they must first subdue the wicked man. Plundering a wicked man's house is (1) an act of recovering what he did not deserve to begin with, or (2) a form of punishment. Law enforcement officials do it all the time.

Either with him or against him

- **He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters** (Luke 11:23).

That is a very simple but direct statement about being with Jesus or not. There can be no middle ground, or neutral observers. We are either with Jesus or we are against him. No man can claim otherwise. The founding fathers of our American government chose to be neutral about Jesus. They refused to commit our government to be with him, which meant it was against him.

Consequently, our government has gradually but increasingly become actively against Jesus. And as faith in Christ has weakened among the population, that opposition to him has become increasingly vicious. Our founding fathers gave some lip service to God, thinking that was enough. It was not, nor will it ever be. For our government now serves the devil. And so it is with every man who is not with Jesus.

Only good thoughts can defeat evil ones

- **When the unclean spirit departs out of the man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest. And not finding, it says, I will return to my house from where I came out. And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered in, it dwells there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first** (Luke 11:24-26).

Jesus is here warning about not keeping your heart full of righteous thoughts. He is comparing our thoughts with unclean spirits. Although evil thoughts may be driven from a man, if he does not fill his heart with righteous ones, then evil thoughts will return and be much worse than at the beginning.

Paul spoke some beautiful words to encourage us to think upon good things, when he said, **"Finally brothers, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are commendable, if anything is a virtue, and if anything is praiseworthy, think on these things"** (Philippians 4:8). Of course, thinking about evil things

for the purpose of combating and condemning them is not in itself evil thinking. It is good thinking to consider how to combat and condemn evil.

And remember what I said in my comments about noticing how we hear (see Luke 8:18): In one sense our minds are like our stomachs. Just as it is filthy and dangerous to put filthy and toxic substances in our stomachs, so also it is foolish to put filthy and dangerous things into our minds. As I have become older and wiser, I strive more actively to reject and shun things I hear and see that are filthy and dangerous. Indeed, such things now seem like putrid food to my senses; they are nauseous and repulsive. People with filthy minds are attracted to filthy experiences. People with pure and clean minds are repulsed by them, and instead are attracted to pure and clean experiences.

One of the foolish things this generation of Americans has tolerated is the proclamation of filthy words and sights. They now worship our federal Constitution, and use that document to justify allowing those evil things. But they are hypocrites, because they have very stringent rules and controls over what kinds of things can be put into our mouths. Consequently, the physical health of our citizens has improved, but their spiritual and mental health has become much worse.

Who are blessed

- **And it came to pass, as he said these things, a certain woman, having lifted up her voice out of the crowd, said to him, Blessed is the belly that bore thee, and the breasts that thou suckled. But he said, Blessed rather, are those who hear the word of God, and keep it (Luke 11:27-28).**

Members of the Roman Catholic Church commit sin when they worship Mary the mother of Jesus. She was indeed a wonderful righteous woman who was specially chosen and blessed by God. And certainly Jesus loved her. However, whenever anyone made a comment about her, he told them that those who obey God are the most important people, regardless of any earthly relationship they may have had with him. The Catholic Church has also invented many myths about Mary that are false. They have even elevated her to near equality with Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said when he was told that his mother and brothers wanted to see him: **“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And having stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, he said, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in the heavens, he is my brother, and sister, and mother”** (Matthew 12:47-50).

Asking for a sign

- **And when the multitudes gathered together he began to say, This generation is evil. They seek a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah, the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of man will be to this generation (Luke 11:29-30).**

Jesus was performing many marvelous miracles of healing. Yet the most prominent men of the people wanted him to create some spectacular sign. Matthew tells of such a time:

“And the Pharisees and Sadducees who came, testing, demanded him to exhibit to them a sign from the sky” (Matthew 16:1). Jesus is here warning the multitudes about making such a foolish demand.

Jesus had no intention of catering to them that way, because they were an evil and adulterous generation. The only sign he was going to give them (of the kind they wanted) was something far greater than a spectacular sight in the sky. He was going to arise from the dead after three days. That was like the experience of Jonah, who was swallowed by the sea creature for three days (see the book of Jonah for that story). Jehovah sent Jonah to preach condemnation to the sinful Ninevites. And from what Jesus said, those people learned about the miraculous recovery of Jonah, making him a sign to them, a sign that God did send him. And they repented.

All of the great works that Jesus was doing before their eyes clearly demonstrated that God had sent him to proclaim the kingdom of God. And the only spectacular sign he would give them would be his resurrection from the dead. And that would only be seen by a few of his disciples. Everyone else would need to learn about it from the testimony of those witnesses.

Generations judging each other

- **The queen of the south will awake in the judgment with the men of this generation, and will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.**
- **The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here** (Luke 11:31-32).

Here is the story of the queen of the south: **“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of Jehovah, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she conversed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon answered to her all her questions; there was not anything hid from the king which he did not answer.**

“And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the seating of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah, there was no more spirit in her.

“And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came, and my eyes had seen it. And, behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, who hear thy wisdom. Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighted in thee to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because Jehovah loved

Israel forever, therefore he made thee king, to do justice and righteousness” (First Kings 10:1-9).

Jesus was indeed greater than Solomon, much greater. Yet that generation did not appreciate his greatness. Therefore, they were going to be condemned by other people who appreciated the prophets and the wise men that were much less great. It was truly an evil and adulterous generation, and they deserved to be destroyed, which happened forty years after Jesus began his ministry. The expression “ends of the earth” is a figure of speech that simply means a far distance. (Remember, read the small book of Jonah to see how the men of Nineveh repented at Jonah’s preaching.)

Notice how Jesus said the men and women of different generations would judge each other on the day of judgment. And I have no doubt that the forefathers of America will rise up in the judgment, and will condemn this generation because of their sinfulness. Nevertheless remember, the final judgment always belongs to Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Making light visible

- **And no man, having lit a lamp, puts it in a concealed place, nor under the bushel, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter in may see the light** (Luke 11:33).

Luke told of another time when Jesus gave that same lesson: **“And no man, having lit a lamp, covers it with a container, or places it under a bed, but places it on a lampstand, so that those who enter in may see the light. For there is no secret that will not become visible, nor hid, that will not be known and come to be visible”** (Luke 8:16-17).

Remember, Jesus went to many places preaching his good news of our salvation. Therefore, he gave his lessons to many different people at many different times. Those two passages are an example of that. See my comments about that lesson in what I said about the earlier passage.

The lamp of the body

- **The lamp of thy body is the eye. Therefore, when thine eye is sound, thy whole body is also bright, but when it is bad, thy body is also dark. Watch therefore the light in thee not be darkness. If therefore thy whole body is bright, not having any part dark, the whole will be bright, as when the lamp illuminates thee by the radiance** (Luke 11:34-36).

Similar words were recorded in Matthew (see 6:22-23). However, the warning about not letting the light in us be darkness is not in the account in Matthew. That warning is somewhat of a riddle, because how can light be darkness? The answer is that Jesus was not speaking about literal light, but the knowledge of truth. And Jesus warned us not to allow our knowledge to be darkness, meaning untrue.

That is the main way the devil keeps men in subjection to him, by keeping them from the truth about God and his word. He causes their light to be darkness, their knowledge to be

false. He leads them astray into all kinds of error, which blinds their hearts. Consider this passage from the book of Revelation: **“And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him”** (Revelation 12:9).

Deceit (which is a form of darkness) seems to be his chief weapon, and it is always used by those who follow his ways. For example, they use it to prey upon others, to attack those who oppose them, and to justify themselves.

Cleanse the inside as well as the outside

- **Now as he spoke a certain Pharisee asks him that he might dine with him. And having entered in, he sat down. And when the Pharisee saw, he marveled that he did not first wash before dinner.**
- **And the Lord said to him, Now ye Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but your interior is full of plundering and wickedness. Ye foolish men, did not he who made the outside also make the inside? But give compassion, things that are inside, and behold, all things are clean to you** (Luke 11:37-41).

A similar rebuke was also recorded in Matthew (see 23:25-26). When Jesus accepted the invitation to eat with someone, he did not hesitate to use the opportunity to teach a lesson, even if it meant criticizing his host. And that Pharisee gave him an opportunity when he marveled because Jesus did not first wash before eating.

Jesus severely rebuked the Pharisees (calling them foolish men) for emphasizing outward cleanliness, while the inside of them was full of evil. The inside he spoke about was their minds and their hearts, which were full of thoughts of plundering and wickedness.

Jesus said if they gave compassion then all things were clean to them. Compassion is a form of love. And remember what Jesus said about the two great commandments: **“Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 22:37-40).

If we gave compassion to God, we would never sin against him. And if we gave compassion to our neighbor we would never offend him. Therefore, if we always acted that way, then we would never sin. That means whatever we did would be clean to us. That means we have the liberty to do anything, as long as we obey those two great commands. It is when we violate them that we sin.

We have liberty to do anything within that realm. But Paul warned us that not all things are expedient: **“All things are permitted for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are permitted for me, but not all things are constructive”** (First Corinthians 10:23). In other words, we should not use our liberty in Christ to do things that are not beneficial. For example, there are righteous things we can do that may not be expedient under certain circumstances. We should never cease living wisely.

Neglecting the more important things

- **But woe to you Pharisees! Because ye tithe mint and rue and every plant, and pass by justice and the love of God. It is necessary to do these things, and not to neglect those things (Luke 11:42).**

Those hypocrites were very careful to obey many of the legal requirements of the law of Moses (those they chose to obey), but they neglected the most important parts, such as justice and the love of God. Like modern Jews, as well as most modern believers in Christ, those Pharisees chose for themselves which of the laws to obey and which to pass by. Jesus said we should obey all of God's commands.

They loved the praised of men

- **Woe to you Pharisees! Because ye love the place of honor in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces (Luke 11:43).**

Such behavior is commonly done by many men throughout the world. They act and dress in special ways to make others think highly of them. For they love to be praised and exalted among men. A classic example of such men are the rulers of the Roman Catholic Church. They wear very ornate and ostentatious apparel in their public appearances, and they expect everyone to address them with lofty titles and to bow down to them. Many Protestants also reverse the collars of their shirts to make them appear distinct from other believers, and they expect people to call them Reverend.

They were like unseen sepulchers

- **Woe to you scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like the unseen sepulchers, and the men who walk over them do not know (Luke 11:44).**

Those are very harsh words for those scholars and Pharisees, and they reveal the depths of their hypocrisy. But those leaders were not unique to those times. For history is filled with examples of such men. Therefore, we need to be very careful about which of our leaders to believe.

We need to use the same standard of judgment that Jesus gave to reveal false prophets: **“But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves. From their fruits ye will know them.**

“Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. So then from their fruits ye will know them” (Matthew 7:15-20).

Use the standard of the word of God to see how they live and behave (the fruits they produce) to show if they are righteous or not.

Woe to you lawyers

- **And having answered, a certain man of the lawyers says to him, Teacher, in saying these things thou rebuke us also. And he said, Woe also to you lawyers! Because ye load men with burdens difficult to bear, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers (Luke 11:45-46).**

The lawyers together with the scholars and the Pharisees were great hypocrites. The lawyers created many ways to bypass obeying the requirements of the law for themselves, things such as legal technicalities and what we call loopholes. Yet they yoked the people with rigid interpretations of the law, and they added many legalisms to increase their requirements.

It is very common among sinful rulers, both ancient and modern, to keep finding ways to gain more control over the people and add more burdens to them, while at the same time exempting themselves. They do their best to conceal it, but a little investigation will reveal many examples.

Killing prophets then honoring them

- **Woe to you! Because ye build the sepulchers of the prophets, but your fathers killed them. Consequently, ye testify and approve the works of your fathers, because they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchers (Luke 11:47-48).**

The ancient Israelites persecuted all of the prophets in some way. Most people do not realize how rebellious those Israelites were. Consider what Moses himself said to them not long before he died: **“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you”** (Deuteronomy 9:24). Moreover, they often resented and rebelled against Moses as well as Jehovah. Rebellion against righteousness has been typical of their behavior throughout history.

That mentality against the righteousness of God is also very typical of many people who claim to believe in Christ. They piously claim to follow Jesus, but they ignore his commands. They speak well of the apostles of Jesus. Yet I have no doubt that were those men to return and teach the same words, they would be just as persecuted now as they were by the Jews. They would be persecuted because most modern believers in Christ are disobedient to him, clinging instead to their false doctrines and myths about him. And they resent all efforts calling upon them to repent and obey.

After prophets are persecuted and die, then later events prove they were teaching the word of God. Therefore, the later generations honor them, and do things like build monuments and special sepulchers for them. That pattern is also typical among men.

The wisdom of God said

- **Because of this also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles (Luke 11:49).**

When Jesus spoke about the wisdom of God he was speaking about foretelling events of the future. Solomon wrote more about the wisdom of God than any other man. And what he said indicates the wisdom of God was like the great master-blueprints that God first designed and then used for his creations. Those master-blueprints include all of Creation over space and time. In other words, everything that will happen or that can happen were included in those master-blueprints—from the world's formless beginning to its fiery ending.

Solomon symbolized the wisdom of God as a noble woman serving God faithfully. And the wisdom of God also wants to serve us, to enlighten us and guide our way in life. Here is one passage Solomon wrote about her earnest desire for us to use her: **“Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding put forth her voice? ... Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it”** (Proverbs 8:1-11).

Solomon then went on to show how God first formulated those master-blueprints (the wisdom of God), and then used them when he was creating the world: **“Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was, when there were no depths. I was brought forth when there were no fountains abounding with water, before the mountains were settled, before the hills. I was brought forth while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world.**

“When he established the heavens, I was there. When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong, when he gave to the sea its bound that the waters should not transgress his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, a master workman. And I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his habitable earth. And my delight was with the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:22-31).

Hence, Jesus said it was the wisdom of God that foretold he would send to them prophets and apostles. I speak much more about the wisdom of God in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

Remember, referring to the wisdom of God as a woman is figurative, not literal. Let not foolish men persuade you the wisdom of God is a real person. Nor was Jesus Christ the wisdom of God. Some also claim “she” represents the feminine side of God. There is no evidence in the Bible that God has a feminine side. Remember, there is nothing feminine in all of heaven. The feminine gender is for this world only. Be not led astray by the deceit and delusions of men.

Persecuting those sent by God

- **And some of them they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets that was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I say to you, it will be required of this generation** (Luke 11:49-51).

That generation during the time of Jesus had the very Son of God in their midst, teaching them about the kingdom of God, and offering them eternal salvation. Yet they persecuted him, and eventually crucified him. Moreover, they persecuted all of those he sent to them, which included prophets and apostles.

Therefore, forty years after Jesus began his ministry, God sent the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem, the temple, and their nation. And he scattered the small remnant of the survivors throughout other nations. That generation deserved the ultimate earthly punishment because of what they had done to the very Son of God and to his servants.

Cain and Abel were the first sons of Adam and Eve. But when those brothers were grown Cain murdered Abel because he was more obedient to Jehovah (see Genesis 4).

Regarding Zachariah, Matthew says he was the “**son of Barachiah**” (Matthew 23:35). There is disagreement about who he was. There were several men in the Old Testament named Zechariah, but none named Zachariah.

The man Jesus mentioned is probably the man who has a book listed in the Old Testament. Here is how his book begins: “**In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Jehovah came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, Jehovah was greatly displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou to them, Thus says Jehovah of hosts: Return to me, says Jehovah of hosts, and I will return to you, says Jehovah of hosts**” (Zechariah 1:1-3). However, there is no record of how he died.

We do have a record of a Zechariah who was murdered in the temple area. However, the Bible says he was the son of Jehoiada: “**And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest. And he stood above the people, and said to them, Thus says God, Why do ye transgress the commandments of Jehovah, so that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken Jehovah, he has also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah**” (Second Chronicles 24:20-21).

Nevertheless, it is not important for us to know such details. They are incidental to the message Jesus was making.

Taking away the key of knowledge

- **Woe to you lawyers! Because ye took away the key of knowledge. Ye did not enter in yourselves, and ye hindered those who were entering in** (Luke 11:52).

The key of knowledge is faith in the good news of Jesus Christ. For that faith opens the door to learn all of the word of God—that which is contained in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. And understanding the word of God is the true source of knowledge about (1) the nature of existence, both natural and spiritual, and (2) about God and his will for us. See my book *Becoming Son of God for Eternity* for much more detail about those things.

Those Jewish lawyers were opposing that faith. They would not accept that faith themselves. Consequently, they could not obtain that knowledge. And they hindered those who were using their faith to obtaining it.

Harassing Jesus to speak impulsively

- **And after he said these things to them, the scholars and the Pharisees began to harass him extremely, and to provoke him to speak impulsively about more things, waiting to ambush him, seeking to catch something out of his mouth so that they might accuse him** (Luke 11:53-54).

That tactic of the scholars and Pharisees is very commonly used by the disciples of the devil to combat those who oppose them; provoking the emotions of a man will make it more probable he will act unwisely. Indeed, that method of combating an adversary is used in many situations, from sports to politics. For Solomon said, **“He whose spirit is without restraint is a city that is broken down and without walls”** (Proverbs 25:28). Emotionalism makes a man very vulnerable. It is a characteristic of fools.

Moreover, by provoking a man to speak without giving him time to think carefully, will make it much more probable that he will misspeak in some way. For Solomon also said, **“Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely”** (Proverbs 10:19). Therefore, beware of those things happening to you in your opposition to sinful men. Be cautious and wise, and never allow yourself to be provoked to speak hastily or impulsively. And always keep your emotions under control.

The leaven of the Pharisees

- **During which time the myriads of the multitude having gathered together so as to trample each other, he began first to say to his disciples, Take heed to yourselves from the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy** (Luke 12:1).

The myriads of the multitude gathered together to him, not because they wanted to learn from him or become his disciples, but for other reasons. There is always the excitement of crowds. There was the spectacle of him healing people. They also enjoyed hearing him rebuke their rulers. And of course, there were those who sought to be healed. However, the multitude did not seek him because they sought the righteousness of God. Otherwise, they would not have trampled each other. Righteous people never act that way.

Regarding leaven, a tiny amount of leaven in the dough will have a great affect on the loaf, one that makes it much more desirable. Hypocrisy is pretending to be what you are not; it is an evil. And as with leaven in dough, hypocrisy has the potential to have a great affect on a man's life. But as with all evil, hypocrisy has a very undesirable affect, a harmful effect. When a man lives a lie, his soul becomes completely corrupted.

Those words were also recorded in Matthew, but the record there says, **“Then they understood that he said not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** (Matthew 16:5-12). What the Pharisees and Sadducees

taught was a perverted religion and a corrupted morality. And they themselves lived a lie, being hypocrites. Therefore, Jesus warned his disciples about them.

Nothing hidden that will not be known

- **But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Therefore, as many things as ye have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what ye have spoken in the ear in the inner chambers will be proclaimed upon the housetops (Luke 12:2-3).**

Everything will be revealed on the great day of judgment. For the book of Revelation says, **“And I saw a great white throne, and him who sits upon it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:11-12).

We will be judged by everything we did, even the most casual things. For Jesus said, **“But I say to you, that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they will render account about it in the day of judgment”** (Matthew 12:36).

The world loves secrecy because their deeds are evil. As modern America has become more sinful the people have demanded more rights of privacy. They want their sins concealed. Of course, in this evil world there is a need for some privacy. But a sinful generation wants too much privacy. They want their sins concealed. Nevertheless, in the great day of judgment there will be no privacy. Everything will be revealed and made known.

We are children of light, not of the darkness. Therefore, Jesus commanded us to proclaim him upon the housetops, meaning as visibly as possible. There is nothing secret about the kingdom of God and the good news of Christ. The world needs to know the truth about what Jesus taught us.

When Jesus spoke about telling them things in the darkness, he was simply referring to the times when he spoke to them in private, away from the demanding multitudes who constantly followed him. However, after he ascended into heaven they proclaimed everything he taught to them.

Who to fear

- **And I say to you my friends, Be not afraid of those who kill the body, and after these things not having anything more severe to do. But I will show you whom ye should fear. Fear him, who, after killing, has power to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, fear ye him (Luke 12:4-5).**

Our faith in God and the hope we have through Jesus Christ gives us great courage. With that faith and hope we have no fear of those who can kill our body. Certainly it is normal and healthy to fear death. But for us who believe in Christ we fear the death of our soul much more than the death of our body.

Indeed, the greatest fear everybody should have is of God who is able to destroy our body, and cast our soul into hell. Remember however, the kind of fear of him that he wants of his disciples is not a feeling of terror, but an attitude of great awe, and a recognition of the power he has to punish severely. For he has the power to cast into hell, the lake of fire that burns forever. Only blind fools have no fear of him now, but they will be terrified at the great day of judgment.

God's complete knowledge and control

- **Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, ye are superior to many sparrows (Luke 12:6-7).**

Jesus is here illustrating how God not only controls whatever happens in the world, but he also knows everything about us. Not a sparrow being forgotten means nothing is outside of his control. The hairs of our head all being numbered is an example of God's complete awareness of everything. He does those things through the energy of the seven Spirits of God that shine before his throne. I speak much more about God's control and awareness of everything in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

If sparrows have value, Jesus said we have much greater value. Therefore, we should have no fear, but trust the care of our heavenly Father. We have so much value to him that Jesus said, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

Confessing Jesus before men

- **And I say to you, every man who will confess in me before men, the Son of man will also confess in him before the agents of God, but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the agents of God (Luke 12:8-9).**

America was founded by men who believed in the Holy Bible and in Christ. However, since the country decided to forsake God and become pagan it has become increasingly difficult to confess faith in Christ, especially to confess the authentic Christ and not the popular mythical one invented by men.

Consequently, our faith in him is being tested more severely. And there are many countries throughout the world where confessing Christ is even more difficult. Indeed, in some Muslim countries they have even made it a capital crime.

Nevertheless, the early Christians suffered much more persecution for confessing in Christ than most people do in modern times. Their persecution began with the Jews, who even persecuted the apostle Paul in foreign countries. Then later after the destruction of Israel the Romans began to persecute Christians. Therefore, as Jesus prophesied, we are always going to be persecuted in some ways, more or less as the times and conditions cycle.

Be prepared, therefore, to confess your faith in Christ even when severely persecuted. Keep your eyes on the hope that is set before us when Jesus will confess us before the agents of God. And we will be rewarded with citizenship in the new Jerusalem of heaven to live with God as his sons for eternity.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

- **And every man who will speak a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him, but to him who blasphemed against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven (Luke 12:10).**

In order to understand what Jesus meant by blasphemy of the Spirit, you need to know that the Holy Spirit of God personifies all that is righteous. For Paul said, **“Therefore I make known to you, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed, and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit”** (First Corinthians 12:3). According to what Paul said, God’s Holy Spirit is the ultimate force underlying every act of righteousness, whatever it may be. (I explain that much more in my comments about that passage in First Corinthians.)

Hence, I believe blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a single sin but an enduring attitude of the heart. I believe it refers to an attitude of contempt toward the works of righteousness, which some men clearly have. Matthew says that Jesus uttered those words about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit when the Pharisees showed the contempt they had toward his good work of casting out demons (see Matthew 12:31-32). And any man who lives and dies with that attitude of heart will never be forgiven.

I speak in much more detail about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. In the appendix to that book I also explain how every man not guilty of blasphemy against the Spirit may have the opportunity to work his way out of hell by paying every debt he owes against God. Jesus implied that when he spoke of having to pay “the last quadrans” if you are not reconciled with your creditor (see Matthew 5:26). And since we are all indebted to God, then every man not redeemed by his Son Jesus Christ will be required to pay his every debt.

Nevertheless, even though I believe some souls can be finally released from hell that way, they will never become sons of God to live with him and with Christ in the New Jerusalem of heaven. Moreover, every soul with that contemptuous attitude in his heart about righteousness (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) will never get out, because that sin will never be forgiven.

Be not anxious in your defense

- **And when they bring you to the synagogues, and the principal positions, and the offices of authority, be not anxious how or what ye should answer in defense, or what ye should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say (Luke 12:11-12).**

Part of our persecution is by the civil authorities. They make laws outlawing our obedience to the commands of Christ, and then they prosecute us when we disobey those laws.

Jesus knew that would happen. Indeed, it happened to him, which is why he was crucified. Therefore, Jesus gave those very encouraging words that we should not be anxious when faced with those kinds of trials.

Jesus even said that the Holy Spirit would teach us what we ought to say. The Holy Spirit teaches us what to say in our defense mainly by the knowledge we have of the word of God. Remember, Jesus quoted a scripture to oppose each of the three temptations that the devil gave him after he fasted forty days in the wilderness. Remember also, the word of God was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, that is one way the Holy Spirit teaches us what we ought to say. And he may also somehow guide our thoughts during those moments. For as disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit resides in us.

Concern about riches

- **And a certain man out of the crowd said to him, Teacher, speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Watch, and keep away from greed, because to any man, life to him is not in the abundance of things possessed by him (Luke 12:13-15).**

There are at least three important lessons in that story. First notice how Jesus told the man he had no authority to be a judge or an arbitrator over them. While he was upon the earth Jesus never sought to usurp the designated authority of any man. Not unless that authority was used unlawfully, as with the example of the merchants in the temple. The chief priests, the scholars, and the elders had allowed those merchants to be there. But Jesus quoted the passage that showed how they were not authorized by God. For he said to them, **“Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But ye made it a den of robbers”** (Mark 11:17).

Paul also spoke about how we were to obey designated authorities, unless they command things unrighteous: **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted”** (Romans 13:1). Notice how he said **“there is no office of authority if not by God.”** In other words, if the office of authority or the office holder does not promote the righteousness of God, then they are not recognized by God. And we are not commanded to obey their unrighteousness. Nevertheless, beware of disobeying them without careful forethought and preparation for the consequences.

The second lesson for us is to watch and keep away from greed. For our eternal souls are much more important than how much wealth we have. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“For what does it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:26).

The third lesson is that Jesus refused the request of the man. He would not even speak to the man’s brother about the issue. Hence, we are not obligated to literally obey commands of Jesus like this one: **“Give to him who asks thee, and turn thou not away from him who wants to borrow from thee”** (Matthew 5:42).

The parable of the rich man and his goods

- **And he spoke a parable to them, saying, The land of a certain rich man brought forth well. And he pondered within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have nowhere I will store my crops?**
- **And he said, I will do this. I will dismantle my barns, and I will build greater, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou have many goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry.**
- **But God said to him, Thou foolish man, they demand thy soul from thee this night, and the things that thou prepared, whose will they be? So is he who stores up for himself, and is not being rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).**

That parable seems to have been given primarily to reinforce the warning Jesus gave about greed. And it teaches the lesson that our lives in this world are very uncertain. For any one of us could perish at any time. It is very foolish to prepare for the future in this life and not for the afterlife. That rich man was only concerned about his worldly wealth and how he could best use it to enjoy his life here. He had no thought for being rich toward God. He planned to use his wealth only for himself, to take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry. And the world is filled with rich men with that same mentality.

Nevertheless, it is certainly wise and right before God for us to take care of our livelihood and our possessions. For Solomon said, **“Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds. For riches are not forever. And does the crown endure to all generations?”**

“The hay is carried, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the cost of the field. And then will be goats’ milk enough for thy food; for the food of thy household, and maintenance for thy maidens” (Proverbs 27:23-27).

The main lesson in the parable was that the rich man was **“not being rich toward God.”** He was filled with greed for himself, and ignored his duty to God to use his riches for more than his own pleasures.

Be not anxious about your life

- **And he said to his disciples, Because of this I say to you, be not anxious for your life, what ye may eat, nor for the body, what ye may wear. For the life is more than the food, and the body, the clothing. Consider the ravens, because they do not sow, nor do they reap, for which there is no storehouse nor barn, and God feeds them. How much ye are worth more than the birds.**
- **And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his age? If then ye are not able to do even the least, why are ye anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow. They toil not, nor do they spin, and I say**

to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. And if God so clothes the grass in the field, which today is, and tomorrow being cast into the oven, how much more you, O ye of little faith?

- **And do not seek what ye may eat, and what ye may drink, and do not be unsettled. For the nations of the world seek all these things, and your Father knows that ye have need of these things. However, seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you (Luke 12:22-31).**

Anxiety is a kind of fear or foreboding about the future. Some kinds of fear are healthy, such as our fear of lightning and our fear of God. However, anxiety is fear that involves a paralyzing doubt. And that is not what our Lord wants of us. He wants us to trust him. Therefore he spoke those very encouraging words, telling us that God will provide all our needs. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and trust that God will provide for our needs.

Of course, we must labor for our daily bread and shelter. But if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will provide for those things. Seeking his kingdom and his righteousness gives us great assurance so that we need not be anxious for our needs.

The words of Jesus were especially appreciated during those ancient times when the people were much poorer. In modern America there is no person who cannot obtain food and shelter if they genuinely want it. We have a welfare government that guarantees those things. The great majority of the “homeless” in America prefer living like hobos. And those who are not, are only homeless for a short time.

Notice how Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the sky and clothes the lilies of the field. God is actively involved with his world, continually maintaining everything in it and observing everything that happens. I explain how he does those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Giving us the kingdom

- **Fear not, little flock, because your Father is well pleased to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).**

That is yet another example of how Jesus referred to his disciples as sheep. And he encouraged them with those wonderful words, saying that it is well pleasing to our heavenly Father to give us the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. God has a great and wonderful purpose in all that he does.

And remember, Jesus praised God for revealing his truth only to the childlike (the humble souls of the earth): **“I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight”** (Matthew 11:25-26).

We should all rejoice that God our Father wants to give the kingdom to us, which means making us the citizens of it. We, the sheep of Jesus, are the ones that God is going to bring

into the New Jerusalem in heaven to live with him there. I also speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Storing your treasures

- **Sell things possessed by you, and give charity. Make for yourselves purses not becoming old, a treasure unfailing in the heavens, where no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:33-34).**

Christians have a reputation of being a charitable people. And as a whole we are the most charitable people in the world. For we have a great hope of reward in the afterlife. Our charity is helping us store unfailing treasures in heaven. Nevertheless remember, we must be wise and discriminating in all that we do, especially with our charity. For this is a world filled with evil people who seek to take advantage of our generosity. Therefore, be careful about your charity.

Regarding treasures in heaven, it takes a great deal of faith to lay up our treasures in the invisible world of heaven instead of on the earth where we can see and enjoy them now. Nevertheless, as I heard one financial adviser say, “Investments that have no risk would be the only investments to make.” For every earthly treasure can be lost. Indeed, Solomon said, **“Weary not thyself to be rich. Out of thine own wisdom, cease. Will thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For it certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward heaven”** (Proverbs 23:4-5).

Paul also wrote to Timothy about the uncertainty of earthly wealth, when he said, **“Command the rich in the present age not to be arrogant, nor hope in the uncertainty of wealth, but in the living God, who supplies us all things abundantly for enjoyment, to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for that which is coming, so that they may take hold of the eternal life”** (First Timothy 6:17-19).

What Jesus said also provides evidence for what is called degrees of reward in heaven. For he indicates that those who store their treasures in heaven will have more there when this life is over.

Faithful bondmen

- **Let your loins be girded about, and the lights burning, and be ye like men waiting for their lord, when he may return from the wedding festivities, so that when he comes and knocks, they may straightaway open to him. Blessed are those bondmen whom the lord when he comes will find watching.**
- **Truly I say to you, that he will gird himself, and will cause them to sit down, and having come, will serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, and should come in the third watch, and find so, blessed are those bondmen (Luke 12:35-38).**

Faithful bondmen, servants, and employees are greatly appreciated by their masters and their employers. And the righteous ones of them will reward such faithful service. The lesson that Jesus gave is not only good advice for men who are in the service of other men, but it tells us how we should prepare for the afterlife. For it tells us that the Lord himself will reward us personally.

Indeed, Jesus told his disciples, **“In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will take you along to myself, so that where I am, ye may be also”** (John 14:2-3). Jesus has gone into heaven to prepare a place for us. There can be no greater hope for us who are his faithful disciples and bondmen.

Be careful and watch

- **But know this, that if the house-ruler had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, ye also become ready, because the Son of man comes at that hour ye do not suppose** (Luke 12:39-40).

That is another example of the need to be prepared at all times. It is very foolhardy to think you can postpone things commanded by Christ without putting your soul in great jeopardy. Life is too uncertain. Proof of that can be seen every day. Who has never been surprised at the sudden death of someone? Therefore, always be prepared and watch.

Reward for faithful service

- **And Peter said to him, Lord, did thou speak this parable to us, or also to all? And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and wise manager whom his lord will appoint over his service to give the provision on time?**
- **Blessed is that bondman whom his lord when he comes will find so doing. Truly I say to you, that he will appoint him over the things being possessed by him** (Luke 12:41-44).

That is another parable to warn us about being prepared for the judgment. The Lord is promising a great reward for those who serve him faithfully. Being a faithful and wise manager means living a productive and righteous life no matter what our role is here upon the earth. Jesus even says his faithful disciples will be given authority over all that he possesses. That means everything, because God has given his Son everything.

Only those deceived by the devil think that all we will do in heaven is sit on the grass and sing praises to God. The world of heaven contains a dynamic and creative civilization, incomprehensibly superior to this one. And with God and Christ we will reign over everything there. We will be the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation in heaven. For Peter said about us, **“But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession, so that ye might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (First Peter 2:9).

Punishment for unfaithfulness

- **But if that bondman should say in his heart, My lord is late to come, and should begin to beat the servant boys and the servant girls, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken, the lord of that bondman will arrive in a day that he does not expect, and in an hour that he is not aware, and will cut him in two, and will place his portion with the unbelieving (Luke 12:45-46).**

This part of the parable is a warning against abusing our duty before Christ. Notice how severely the Lord will punish those who act cruelly and wantonly, instead of faithfully. He will cut them in two. It is hard to think of anything more severe that can be done to the body of a man. He will also place their share with the unbelieving, which is the torment of hell.

That warning against cruelty to servants also includes cruelty to children. All parents have power and authority over their children. But some parents (especially the drunkards) abuse them. The Bible authorizes our use of corporal punishment to help rear and discipline our children. However, the excessive application of corporal punishment will bring the wrath of God against those guilty of it.

Another lesson in that passage teaches us it is wrong to think every disciple of Christ will remain faithful to be rewarded in heaven. For example, when Paul was giving instructions for young Christian widows, he warned about temptations they would face. And he said, **“For some have already turned aside after Satan”** (First Timothy 5:15). And there are many other examples in the Bible of some disciples turning away from righteousness.

Beaten much and beaten little

- **And that bondman who knew his lord’s will, and who did not prepare, nor do according to his will, will be beaten much, but he who did not know, and did things worthy of blows, will be beaten little (Luke 12:47).**

Jesus added those words (plus the next ones) to this parable about the faithful bondman and the unfaithful one. Those words symbolize our need to be faithful in our service to God and be prepared for the great day of judgment after this world ends. Therefore, the part about being beaten much or little clearly teaches that there will be degrees of punishment in the afterlife. I speak much more about that in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Much given, much required

- **And to every man to whom much was given, much will be required from him. And to whom they entrust much, they will ask him more abundantly (Luke 12:48).**

Those words are certainly true for people in the world. Just consider how our modern taxes work. However, the most important lesson for us in those words is about how we are

going to be judged by God. For the more he has blessed us, the more fruitful he requires us to be.

Casting fire upon the earth

- **I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what I desire is if it were kindled already** (Luke 12:49).

The fire that Jesus cast upon the earth was his church, which is the kingdom of God in the world. It is like a fire because it is at war against sin and wickedness, and we are the soldiers of it, fighting for truth and righteousness. For example, when Paul knew that his life would soon be over, he said, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me in that day, and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing”** (Second Timothy 4:7-8).

Jesus was eager to establish the kingdom of God, which is the church upon the earth. He was eager because it would be a righteous fire, a powerful force, combatting sin and wickedness. It would be like a fire in a field that consumes the briars and thorns of it, making it more fit to grow good crops.

Another immersion

- **But I have an immersion to be immersed, and how am I constrained until it will be accomplished** (Luke 12:50).

The immersion Jesus spoke about in those words was his trial and crucifixion. And he was eager to have that accomplished because it would be the culmination of his perfect obedience to God here upon the earth. The successful completion of that obedience, enduring every trial and temptation, would defeat God’s enemies and earn him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. For it proved (1) his complete moral and spiritual superiority, and (2) that sin was not inevitable. And our Lord and Savior was eager for that to be accomplished.

Not peace but division

- **Do ye suppose that I came to give peace on the earth? I tell you, no, but rather division. For henceforth there will be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. A father will be divided against a son, and a son against a father, a mother against a daughter, and a daughter against a mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law** (Luke 12:51-53).

Remember, Jesus has been called the Prince of Peace, which expression is from this prophecy of Isaiah about the Christ: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6). Notice however, that Jesus said he came not to spread peace on the earth, but rather division.

How then could he be called the Prince of Peace? The reason is because there can only be peace when sin and wickedness are defeated. And Jesus came to defeat sin, as his apostle John said: **“He who is doing sin is of the devil, because the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was made known for this, so that he might destroy the works of the devil”** (First John 3:8).

And the reason why even close kin will be divided is because they are divided in their commitment to either sin or to righteousness. Therefore, some of our foes will be those of our own household. Some of them will be our foes because they prefer the ways of sin and darkness instead of the ways of truth and righteousness.

Interpreting conditions

- **And he also said to the multitudes, When ye see a cloud rising from the west, straightaway ye say, A shower is coming, and so it happens. And when a south wind is blowing, ye say, There will be heat, and it happens. Ye hypocrites, ye know how to examine the face of the earth and the sky, but how can ye not examine this season?** (Luke 12:54-56).

Jesus spoke similar words to the Pharisees and Sadducees when they demanded a sign from the sky (see Matthew 16:1-4). As the modern proverb says, “Everybody talks about the weather.” And we all learn how to interpret weather conditions to anticipate what will happen so that we can prepare ourselves.

Jesus used that example about forecasting the weather to teach the multitudes to examine the spiritual things that were happening with him. Learning from him would enable them to anticipate the future of their eternal souls and prepare themselves. And we all need to learn to examine things spiritual from all the word of God, so that we can prepare ourselves for the coming afterlife.

Be reconciled with thine opponent

- **And also why do ye not judge yourselves what is right? For when thou go with thine opponent to the magistrate on the way give effort to be delivered from him, lest he may drag thee to the judge, and the judge may deliver thee to the officer, and the officer would cast thee into prison. I say to thee, thou wilt, no, not come out from there, until thou have paid even the last mite** (Luke 12:57-59).

Again Jesus emphasized the importance of reconciliation. And the command he gave above is more than just good advice about settling worldly disputes. For I believe it refers more broadly to the much more important task of being reconciled to God. And that can only be done through our redemption through Jesus Christ. If we do not become followers of Jesus, there will be no forgiveness of any of our sins. We will pay the price for every one of them, from the greatest to the smallest. I conjecture, in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*, about how that will be paid.

The suffering of sinners

- **Now some were present at the same time who informed him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. And having answered, Jesus said to them, Do ye suppose that these Galileans became sinful above all the Galileans because they have suffered such things? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all perish similarly.**
- **Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do ye think that these became debtors above all the men who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5).**

The record does not say why Pilate punished those Galileans that way. They were obviously guilty of some serious crime, perhaps an attempted insurrection. Nevertheless, Jesus used those two examples of suffering to teach the lesson that when such things happen to sinners it does not indicate they are the worse ones. Such things are a warning to all sinners to repent, lest they too perish. Every unrepentant sinner is under the wrath of God, which can be expressed against him at any time. Men who continue to sin are like fools playing Russian roulette, which is a deadly game of chance.

The parable of the barren fig tree

- **And he spoke this parable. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the vine workman, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none. Cut it down, why also waste the ground?**
- **And having answered, he says to him, Sir, allow it this year also until I may dig around it and cast manure. Although surely it should bear fruit, and if not, in the coming year thou will cut it down (Luke 13:6-9).**

That parable teaches us at least two things. First it tells us that although God is patient with us when we are unfruitful, his patience is not forever. If we do not bear fruit for righteousness, especially when we are given good opportunities, then God will give up on us and we will perish. The second lesson is that we should treat each other the same way. Patiently encouraging fruitfulness in those who are negligent, but giving up on them when they fail to improve.

Matthew reports a time when Jesus cursed a fig tree for not having figs (see Matthew 21:19). That tree he cursed was probably similar to the fig tree described in the above parable, only it continued to be barren. Therefore, it was unworthy of wasting the ground, and deserved being cursed.

Healing on the sabbath

- **And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath day. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years. And she was bent over, and not being able to straighten up completely. And when Jesus saw her, he called out, and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.**
- **And having responded, the synagogue-ruler, being indignant because Jesus healed on the sabbath, answered and said to the multitude, There are six days in which he ought to work. Therefore coming in these, be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath (Luke 13:10-14).**

The Jews often criticized Jesus for things he or his disciples did on the sabbath day. This time however, instead of rebuking Jesus directly for healing on the sabbath, a synagogue-ruler rebuked him indirectly by criticizing the people. He told them there were six days in which “he” (Jesus) ought to work, and **“not on the day of the sabbath.”** That was both a cowardly and an insulting way to condemn Jesus.

I cannot judge the motives of that synagogue-ruler, but he seems to have been like the men to whom Jesus said, **“But woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye devour widows’ houses, and praying long in pretence. Because of this ye will receive greater condemnation”** (Matthew 23:14).

That synagogue-ruler was completely indifferent to how that woman was freed from the affliction she had been suffering for so long a time. That story is a good example of the blind legalism of the Jews, which commonly results in causing more evil than good.

That synagogue-ruler gave the impression he was faithfully defending the law of Moses. But what he said was very cruel to that suffering woman, condemning her indirectly with Jesus. He condemned her, for being healed and for glorifying God about it, by inferring she was part of violating the law of Moses.

He was no different from the Pharisees who accused Jesus of casting out demons by the ruler of the demons (see Matthew 12:24). That accusation also condemned those who were healed by implying they were healed by the power of the devil (the ruler of the demons).

Jesus justifies healing on the sabbath

- **But the Lord therefore answered him and said, Ye hypocrites, does not each of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and after leading away, give to drink? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound, lo, eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?**

- **And as he said these things all those opposing him were shamed, and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him** (Luke 13:15-17).

God never intended the blessing of the sabbath day of rest to become the great burden the sinful Jews had made of it. Jesus justifiably rebuked the synagogue ruler and those who agreed with him. He called them hypocrites, and he proved it with his reasoning, which they could not refute. Consequently, they were shamed in front of the multitude, because the people rejoiced for all the glorious things Jesus did. The common people had more wisdom than those religious leaders.

That example teaches us that it is not wise for us to blindly accept all the judgments of our religious leaders. Many foolish people do, especially the Roman Catholics, and they are being led astray because of it.

Notice how Jesus said that Satan had bound the woman for those eighteen years that she was unable to straighten up completely. Satan was the cause of her affliction, and the Bible indicates he is the ultimate cause of all our afflictions. For example, when Peter was telling Cornelius about Jesus, he said that Jesus **“passed through doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him”** (Acts 10:38). I speak much more about Satan in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The kingdom is like a mustard plant

- **And he said, What is the kingdom of God like, and to what will I compare it? It is like a grain of a mustard plant, which having taken, a man cast into his own garden. And it grew and developed into a great tree, and the birds of the sky lodged in the branches if it** (Luke 13:18-19).

The kingdom of God is like a grain of a mustard plant because the kingdom began very small but has grown great. And it has become a haven for all who love God and his righteousness. I recently spoke with my wife about how much poorer our lives would be without the regular fellowship of our Christian brothers and sisters.

The kingdom is like leaven

- **And again he said, To what will I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman having taken, hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened** (Luke 13:20-21).

Only a very small amount of leaven is needed to make a very great change in a loaf of bread. And that change is for the better, because unleavened bread is always inferior. Indeed, in the Bible unleavened bread is called bread of affliction (see for example Deuteronomy 16:3). Unleavened bread was only used in times of deprivation and hardship, or during times of sacrifice to God.

Jesus said the kingdom of God was like leaven in meal. Mixing leaven in the meal makes the bread much better. And that is what the kingdom of God does to the population of people. Our good influence as faithful disciples of Christ increases the righteousness of the

land. And as Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

Rulers like those of communist China who fear the churches of Christ are greatly deceived by the devil. We faithful disciples of Christ are a treasure for their country and not a threat. It is the false churches like the Roman Catholics that are a threat to them, not the genuine churches of Christ. Our righteousness contributes to nations being exalted, not reproached. Moreover, when the general population sees the great value and benefits of our righteousness, it encourages them to be more righteous.

Compete to enter the narrow gate

- **And he went through by cities and villages, teaching, and making a journey toward Jerusalem. And a certain man said to him, Lord, are they few who are being saved? And he said to them, Compete to enter in by the narrow gate, because many, I say to you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able** (Luke 13:22-24).

The man who asked the Lord if there were few who are being saved may have asked that question because Jesus only had a relatively small number of disciples. The large multitudes who followed Jesus were with him either to be healed or for other reasons, such as this one he said to them: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled”** (John 6:26).

Words about entering the narrow gate were also recorded in Matthew 7:13-14. Luke adds how Jesus said that many would seek to enter in and would not be able. There are various ways that people are not able to be saved. For example, there are many who want to enter into the kingdom of God, but are not able because they refuse to obey the things that Jesus commanded. They refuse even simple commands like being immersed in water for the remission of their sins.

Another example of not being able to enter is from the parable of the seven wise and seven foolish virgins (see Matthew 25). The foolish virgins were not able to enter into the marriage festivities because they failed to carefully prepare for it. And that symbolizes the inability of souls to enter into the joys of heaven because they would not carefully prepare.

Who Jesus will acknowledge

- **From the time the house-ruler has risen up, and has closed the door, and ye begin to stand outside, and to knock the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and having answered, he will say to you, I know not where ye are from, then ye will begin to say, We ate and drank in thy presence, and thou taught in our thoroughfares. And he will say, I tell you, I know not where ye are from. Depart from me, all ye workmen of unrighteousness** (Luke 13:25-27).

Of all the people who will think that Jesus will acknowledge them in the day of judgment, surely it will be those who were actually with him, who heard his teachings, and who ate

and drank in his presence. Yet Jesus is saying here that many of those very persons will be thrust out of the kingdom of God because they were workmen of unrighteousness.

When Jesus said that he would tell them he did not know where they were from, that means he would not acknowledge them as belonging to him. He would disown them as they had disowned him by their unrighteousness. That lesson also teaches us that there are souls in the kingdom of God here upon the earth that will be cast out in heaven. They will be cast out because of their unrighteousness.

The kingdom of God in heaven

- **There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when ye will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you being thrust out. And they will arrive from the east and west, and from the north and south, and will sit down in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28-29).**

The Hebrews were the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They had been the chosen people of God. However, because they rejected Jesus Christ the Son of God, they will be rejected from the kingdom of God in heaven. Consequently, they will be cast into the outer darkness, while many Gentiles from around the world will be accepted. Those Gentiles will be accepted because they believed and obeyed our Savior Jesus Christ.

Weeping indicates great sorrow. Gnashing of teeth indicates great anger. Hence, there will be both great sorrow and great anger in hell, which place is in the outer darkness. Souls will weep there because they will have such great regrets about failing to accept the salvation that Jesus offered. Souls will also gnash their teeth there because they will have great anger that God has cast them into hell. They will be angry because they blame God and not themselves.

I should also mention that there will be many souls who believe in Christ, but will still be cast into the outer darkness because they did not obey him. Therefore, take heed how you live.

The first and the last

- **And behold, there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last (Luke 13:30).**

Jesus' comment about the first and the last refers to our status here upon the earth and in heaven. Just as many of those who are last in this life will be first in the next life, so also many of those who are first in this life will be last in the next one.

There are many things we determine about our lives. But there are also many things that we cannot determine. For example, I did not choose to be born a man in this great and prosperous land. No man chooses when, where, or to whom he is born. There is a modern proverb that says, "There but for the grace of God go I," referring to some suffering soul we might see.

Therefore, God is not going to judge us by our status in the world. He will judge us by what we did with what we had. A good example is the story of a poor widow. She cast into the temple treasury a tiny amount of money, but Jesus said of her, **“Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who are casting into the treasury. For they all cast in from that which is abundant to them, but she from her need cast in all, as many things she had, her whole living”** (Mark 12:43-44).

A threat from Herod

- **In the same day some Pharisees came, saying to him, Get thee out and depart from here, because Herod wants to kill thee. And he said to them, Having gone, say to this fox, Behold, I cast out demons and finish cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am fully perfected. Nevertheless it is necessary for me to go today and tomorrow and the following, because it is not possible for a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem** (Luke 13:31-33).

Jesus had no love for Herod. He even refused to speak with him when Pilate sent Jesus to him during his trial. Therefore, Jesus responded to their report about Herod wanting to kill him by giving Herod a riddle. One that Herod would puzzle about but could not solve. Jesus told his apostles the answer to that riddle, but they did not understand it until after it was fulfilled.

The answer to the riddle is that Jesus would continue to cast out demons and heal people until his trial and crucifixion. And then when he arose the third day, he would be fully perfected to be our Redeemer. For his crucifixion culminated his life of perfect obedience to God, which earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. All of those things were prophesied about him, and were therefore necessary to be fulfilled.

Because Jerusalem rejected him it is rejected

- **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather thy children together as a hen does her brood under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left to you desolate. And I say to you, that ye will, no, not see me, until it will come when ye say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord** (Luke 13:34-35).

The apostle Paul says that Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament. For speaking of the Israelites that Moses led in the wilderness, he said, **“And they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ”** (First Corinthians 10:3-4). That spiritual rock that followed them was Jehovah. He was born and lived as a man on the earth as Jesus the Christ so that he could become our Redeemer.

Jesus, as Jehovah in the Old Testament, often wanted to shelter and protect his people in Jerusalem, as only God can. Yet they constantly refused him. They even killed his prophets and stoned those he sent to speak to them. God is very longsuffering. However, his

patience is not forever. Therefore, because of their continued rebellion he made their house desolate—utterly destroyed.

Moreover, they will never see the Son of God again until they bless those who come in the name of the Lord. Those words could mean they would never understand anything about him until they repented and became his disciples. It could also mean they would never see him again until the day of judgment.

Healing a man with edema

- **And it came to pass, when he went into the house of a certain man of the chiefs of the Pharisees on a sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching him. And behold, there was a certain man in front of him afflicted with edema. And having responded, Jesus spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it permitted to heal on the sabbath? But they were silent.**
- **And having taken him, he healed him and released him. And having responded, he said to them, Of which of you will a son or an ox fall into a pit, and he will not straightaway lift him out on the day of the sabbath? And they could not answer him back to these things (Luke 14:1-6).**

One of the things that the Pharisees frequently criticized Jesus about was how he observed the sabbath. And they always condemned him for healing on the sabbath. Here was a time when Jesus invited them to reason with him about healing on the sabbath. But those wretched hypocrites refused to even answer him. Their hearts were hardened against him, and for them logical reasoning was irrelevant.

Modern hypocrites claim that faith in God and his holy Bible is irrational and based upon feelings not reason. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. But like those ancient Pharisees they will not debate with us. Those men are serving the devil and lying the way he does. For faith in God and his holy Bible is founded upon reason not feeling.

Consider these words that Jehovah spoke to his ancient people Israel: **“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.**

“Come now, and let us reason together, says Jehovah, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye are willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it” (Isaiah 1:16-20).

Notice how Jehovah said to them, **“Come now, and let us reason together”** He gave them good advice, he offered them hope, and he warned of the consequences of refusal. The Bible is filled with knowledge and wisdom for those who have eyes to see and an open heart to learn. The Bible is truly a book of reason. And indeed, the faith that God demands of us is a faith based on reason not feelings.

Feelings alone are blind, and reliance on feelings alone will invariably lead a man astray. Beware of listening to the many believers in Christ who urge you to trust your feelings. Be wise and seek truth and trust it. The greatest successes of mankind have always been based upon seeking truth and trusting it. And there is no greater truth on earth than the word of God contained in the Holy Bible.

Seek not the chief places

- **And he spoke a parable to those who were invited when he noticed how they chose out the chief places, saying to them, When thou are invited by any man to wedding festivities, do not sit down in the chief place, lest there may be a more honorable man than thou who was invited by him. And he who invited thee and him, having come, will say to thee, Give place to this man, and then thou will begin with embarrassment to take the last place.**
- **But when thou are invited, having gone, sit down in the last place, so that when he who has invited thee comes, he will say to thee, Friend, go up higher, then it will be esteem to thee in the presence of those dining with thee. Because every man who lifts himself up will be made lower, and he who makes himself lower will be lifted up (Luke 14:7-11).**

Solomon taught the same thing in this proverb: **“Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men. For it is better that it be said to thee, Come up here, than that thou should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom thine eyes have seen”** (Proverbs 25:6-7). The word of God has always praised the virtue of humility and condemned the evil of pride. Jesus used the occasion when he was invited to a dinner with one of the chiefs of the Pharisees to teach that example of the value of showing humility.

Jesus often rebuked the lawyers and the Pharisees. Nevertheless, he would eat with whoever invited him, whether he approved of them or not. Consider this example: **“And it came to pass while he relaxed in the house, and behold, many tax collectors and sinners having come, they were sitting with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?”** (Matthew 9:10-11).

Jesus used such occasions to teach them, even when what he taught offended those who invited him. Remember this example: **“Now as he spoke a certain Pharisee asks him that he might dine with him. And having entered in, he sat down. And when the Pharisee saw, he marveled that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, Now ye Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but your interior is full of plundering and wickedness. Ye foolish men, did not he who made the outside also make the inside?”** (Luke 11:37-40).

Thus, we have his example of socializing with sinners, but only when we use such occasions to encourage them to repent. And that includes criticizing their sinfulness. We must never socialize with sinners for pleasure only.

Inviting the weak

- **And he also said to the man who invited him, When thou make a dinner or a supper, do not call thy friends, nor thy brothers, nor thy kinsmen, nor prosperous neighbors, lest they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee.**
- **But when thou make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou will be blessed, because they do not have to recompense thee, for it will be recompensed to thee at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:12-14).**

Jesus' command about who to invite to a dinner or a supper teaches us that our purpose for inviting people should not just be to enhance our personal relationships or to simply have a good time. We should also include people who are poor or handicapped. And we should look for our recompense in the afterlife, not from those needy souls we invite.

Nevertheless remember, Jesus also commanded against giving good things to those who are unworthy: **"Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turn back may lacerate you"** (Matthew 7:6). We should always use good judgment in every occasion.

Also, that command about inviting people is not a legalism. He did not mean we should never invite our friends, brothers, kinsmen, and prosperous neighbors to a dinner or a supper. He was simply commanding us not to neglect those who have serious needs. Actually, during these modern times there are many who are maimed, lame, or blind who are well cared for, and do not need our material assistance. However, they do need our spiritual assistance, by encouraging and teaching them.

The parable of the great supper

- **And a certain man of those dining together having heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is he who will eat dinner in the kingdom of God. And he said to him, A certain man made a great supper, and he invited many. And he sent forth his bondman at the hour of the meal to say to those who were invited, Come, because all things are now ready. And they all from one began to make excuse.**
- **The first said to him, I have bought a field, and I have need to go out and see it. I ask thee have me excused. And another said, I bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to test them. I ask thee have me excused. And another said, I married a wife, and because of this I cannot come. And that bondman, having come, he informed his lord these things.**
- **Then the house-ruler having become angry, he said to his bondman, Go out quickly into the thoroughfares and lanes of the city, and bring here the poor and maimed and crippled and blind. And the bondman said, Lord, as thou commanded it has happened, and yet there is room.**

- **And the lord said to the bondman, Go out into the roads and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you, that none of those men who were invited will taste of my supper. For many are called, but few chosen (Luke 14:15-24).**

Jesus gave this parable in response to the man who said that those who ate dinner in the kingdom of God are blessed. What the man said was certainly true, and it was commendable for him to say it. However, the people did not really understand the nature of the kingdom of God. And so Jesus gave this parable to teach them more about it.

No doubt the people thought the kingdom of God upon the earth was going to be a glorious one with much wealth and power. They must have reasoned that since God owns everything, surely his kingdom would be highly exalted here. The parable Jesus gave taught something entirely different. The fact is, the kingdom of God on the earth is lowly and unpopular. False imitations of it (like the Catholic Church) have gained power and popularity, but the genuine kingdom of God is hated by the world and persecuted by it. And the most prosperous and influential people find many excuses not to belong to it.

Therefore, Jesus has commanded his disciples to invite the humble and lowly of the world, those who love his truth and righteousness, those who are his sheep and will hear his voice.

Consider these words of Paul: **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent. But God chose the foolish things of the world, so that he might humiliate the wise, and God chose the weak things of the world, so that he might humiliate the powerful. And God chose the common things of the world, and the disdained things, and the things that are not, so that he might make useless the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God”** (First Corinthians 1:26-29).

Another lesson taught in that parable is about the sons of Israel because they had been God’s chosen people. Jesus invited them to become a part of the kingdom of God. But they found many excuses to refuse, especially their leading men. Therefore, Jesus commanded his disciples to invite whoever was receptive, including the disdained harlots and Samaritans, and even the hated tax collectors and Gentiles.

Consider all others to be inferior to Jesus

- **Now many multitudes went with him, and having turned, he said to them, If any man comes to me, and does not regard as inferior his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and besides his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:25-26).**

Other versions, instead of translating the Greek word for “regard inferior” in that passage, they translate it to say “hate.” Hate is a very harsh and rejecting attitude, and it is clearly a mistranslation of that passage. For Jesus would never command us to hate our loved ones. The Greek word they translate as hate can also mean to consider inferior, which, I am persuaded, is what Jesus meant. Some interpret the word hate to mean love less. However,

loving less is never the meaning of hate. Therefore why use it if it does not mean what it says?

Regarding Jesus' words about our attitude toward him, there have been many aggressive men in the world who have made the same kind of demand for ultimate commitment to them. Adolph Hitler is a good example. But only Jesus is worthy. He is worthy because he is the very Son of God, who actually worked with God to create the world. As the apostle John said about him, **"All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be"** (John 1:3).

And the wonderful thing about that commitment is that although we lose things of the world, we gain the glories of eternal life in heaven with him, with God, and with all other righteous souls. You can read more of my comments about similar words that are recorded in my commentary on Matthew 10:37.

Taking up our cross

- **And whoever does not bear his cross, and come behind me, cannot be my disciple** (Luke 14:27).

Matthew also quotes Jesus saying, **"And he who does not take his cross and follow behind me, is not worthy of me"** (Matthew 10:38). Remember, Jesus spoke to many people in many different places. And that explains many of the minor differences in the wording of things he said.

Those are more words warning his followers how hard it is to be one of his disciples. His words about taking our cross and losing our lives symbolize the sacrifices we are expected to make. None of which can compare with the sacrifices Jesus himself made for us. For without his extreme self-sacrifice we would have no hope of eternal salvation in heaven.

Taking up and bearing our cross is figurative for accepting the necessary trials and tribulations of living righteously. It refers to any burden we must bear in order to remain a faithful disciple. And those who are unwilling to take up their cross and follow behind him are not worthy of him. For the suffering he endured to save our souls was much greater than anything we will ever need to endure.

Following behind him means obeying his commandments, all of them. That means all of the commandments he himself spoke while he was here, and all of his commandments that were later spoken in his name by his apostles. Those things are all contained in the New Testament of the Bible.

Counting the costs

- **For which of you wanting to build a tower, does not, having first sat down, count the cost whether he has the things for completion? So that perhaps, having laid its foundation, and not being able to finish, all those who see begin to ridicule him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.**

- **Or what king going to encounter another king in war, will not, having first sat down, consult whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while he is still far off, having sent a delegation, he asks the things about peace.**
- **So therefore every man of you who does not renounce all things being possessed by him, cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:28-33).**

Solomon gave similar advice about planning ahead, when he said, **“Prepare thy work outside, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thy house”** (Proverbs 24:27).

Jesus gave those common examples, of how wise men consider the costs of their ventures, to those who would follow him. No man should commit himself to be a disciple of Christ without first carefully considering the cost. Which cost, Jesus said, was to renounce all things being possessed by him.

What he meant was that nothing we own should ever be an obstacle to serving him. We should be willing to give up anything, or even everything, to serve him. Now that does not mean that every disciple must make himself poor. It means we should make our possessions subordinate to our obedient service as a disciple. And any man not willing to do that cannot be his disciple.

Salt material becoming useless

- **The salt material is good, but if the salt material becomes tasteless, by what will it be seasoned? It is fit neither for the land nor for manure; they cast it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 14:34-35).**

Salt not only adds seasoning and flavoring to foods, but it also adds an important nutrient. And it does not take much salt to be effective. Men in those days apparently did not have pure salt available to them. I am told they probably used some kind of inert rock that contained salt which was dissolved in water for cooking. That would explain why Jesus said that after it lost its saltiness it would be good for nothing, except to be cast out.

Regarding his words about having ears to hear, that means if we are capable of understanding the things that he taught, then we should accept and apply them. For we will be judged by them.

The parable of the lost sheep

- **Now all the tax collectors and sinners were approaching him to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scholars murmured, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.**
- **And he spoke this parable to them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave behind the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go for that which was lost until he finds it? (Luke 15:1-4).**

Jesus often used the common activities of the people in the parables he gave. And that is what he did in response to the particular criticism about receiving sinners and eating with them. The parable is about God and man. And Jesus was teaching them how God does not want any soul to perish. Therefore, he makes special efforts to save those who are lost.

For one example of such special efforts that God makes, consider the book of Jeremiah. Ten times in that book, Jehovah told his people that he rose up early urging them to repent. Here is one passage about God appealing to the people when the expression “rising up early” is used twice: **“From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years, the word of Jehovah has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking. But ye have not hearkened. And Jehovah has sent to you all his servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them ...”** (Jeremiah 25:3-4).

Sharing the joy of finding

- **And when he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes to the house, he calls together his men friends and his men neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost. I say to you, that thus there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous men who have no need of repentance.**
- **Or what woman having ten drachmas, if she lose one drachma, does not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her lady friends and lady neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, because I found the drachma that I lost.**
- **Thus I say to you, there becomes joy in the presence of the agents of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:5-10).**

This part of the parable teaches us how much rejoicing there is in heaven when even one sinner repents. Our Creator, the true and living God, the God of the Bible, is a loving heavenly Father. And he wants every sinner to repent and be saved. Nevertheless, we should not forget that God is also a God of fierce wrath toward those who remain unrepentant.

I want to point out that other English versions of the New Testament do not identify the gender of the neighbors who were asked to rejoice about finding that which was lost. That is one of the weaknesses of the English language. However, the Greek words clearly indicate the neighbors that were called together by the man were other men, and the neighbors that were called together by the woman were other women.

The story of the prodigal son

- **And he said, A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me. And he divided to them his living. And not many days after, the younger son,**

having gathered all together, journeyed into a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth living recklessly.

- **And when he spent all, a mighty famine developed in that country, and he began to be in want. And having gone, he was joined to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he longed to fill his belly from the husks that the swine ate, and no man gave to him.**
- **But when he came to himself, he said, How many hired men of my father's have abundance of loaves, but I am perishing with hunger. After rising, I will go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight. I am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired men.**
- **And having risen, he went to his father. But while he was still distant, afar off, his father saw him and felt compassion. And having ran, he fell on his neck, and kissed him much. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight. I am no more worthy to be called thy son.**
- **But the father said to his bondmen, Bring forth the best robe and clothe him, and give a ring for his hand, and shoes for his feet. And having brought the fatted calf, kill it, and having eaten, we will be cheerful, because this my son was dead, and became alive again. And he was lost, and is found. And they began to be cheerful (Luke 15:11-24).**

That is the famous story about the man we call the prodigal son. There are several lessons we can learn from that parable. One of them is that it is foolish to take our inheritance prematurely, especially when we use it without relying upon good advice. Of course, it is doubly foolish to squander it.

Another lesson is that we should learn from our mistakes. We should humble ourselves and repent when we sin and act foolishly, and we should seek to be reconciled with our Father in heaven.

A third lesson is that when we do humble ourselves and repent (proving it with our actions), our heavenly Father will receive us back kindly and joyfully. And he will bless our returning, especially in the life to come.

The resentful brother

- **But his elder son was in a field. And while coming, having approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And having summoned one of the boys, he inquired what these things might be. And he said to him, Thy brother arrived, and thy father has killed the fatted calf, because he received him back healthy. But he was angry, and would not go in. Therefore, his father having come out, he called him.**

- **But having answered, he said to his father, Lo, so many years do I serve thee, and I never passed by a commandment of thine, and yet thou never gave me a goat that I might be merry with my friends. But when this thy son came, who has devoured thy living with harlots, thou killed for him the fatted calf.**
- **And he said to him, Child, thou are always with me, and all my things are yours. But it was needful to make merry and be glad, because this thy brother was dead, and became alive again, and was lost, and was found** (Luke 15:25-32).

This last part of the parable was especially relevant to the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who were criticizing Jesus' efforts with sinners. Remember, just before Jesus gave the story of the parable about the lost sheep, the record says, **"And the Pharisees and the scholars murmured, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. And he spoke this parable to them, saying ..."** (Luke 15:2-3). Jesus then gave the parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin. After that he gave the parable about the prodigal son. Jesus gave those three parables in response to their criticism about his spending time with sinners.

The main lesson in the last part of the parable of the prodigal son is that regardless of how faithful we have been to God, we should not be resentful when God receives sinners who humble themselves and repent. We should rejoice with him. For consider with what joy the father received his son back. Also consider the extent to which he and those of his household celebrated the return of his prodigal son. And that tells us how it will be in heaven for us when this life is over; that is, for those who humbly repent of their sins, and trust and obey him.

Notice how the father said to the elder son **"all my things are yours."** The word yours in the historic English is plural, as, of course, is the original Greek word. Hence, the prodigal son still had some portion in the possessions of his father.

Nevertheless, the parable does not say that the prodigal son was given another equivalent inheritance. No doubt his portion in the inheritance of the father was reduced according to what he had already been given. And we should not think that God will restore things that we have squandered just because we humble ourselves and repent. He will certainly bless us, but not without experiencing some adverse consequences in this life of our sins.

Remember, there are numerous example in the Bible showing that God does indeed forgive us when we repent but he does not remove all punishment. I say much more about forgiveness and punishment in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Regarding the **"music and dancing"** that the elder son heard. Like most other things, music and dancing can be wholesome forms of pleasure. They can also be unwholesome and even vulgar. What is called the modern dance is certainly unwholesome and sensual. And the dancing of rock-and-roll music (also called rock music) is very sensual and vulgar, as is the music itself. Music and dancing are not of themselves sinful. It is how they are done that can make them sinful. Incidentally, the expression rock-and-roll derives from a slang expression for sexual intercourse.

The unfaithful but shrewd manager

- **And he also said to his disciples, There was a certain rich man who had a manager, and this man was accused to him as squandering things possessed by him. And having called him, he said to him, What is this I hear about thee? Render the account of thy management, for thou can no longer manage. And the manager said within himself, What shall I do because my lord takes away the management from me? I am not able to dig. I am ashamed to beg.**
- **I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from the management they may receive me into their houses. And having summoned each one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first, How much do thou owe to my lord? And he said, A hundred measures of olive oil. And he said to him, Receive thy document, and having sat down, quickly write fifty. Next he said to another, And how much do thou owe? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he says to him, Receive thy document, and write eighty.**
- **And his lord commended the unrighteous manager because he did shrewdly. Because the sons of this age are shrewder in their own generation than the sons of the light (Luke 16:1-8).**

The manager in that story squandered what the rich man had entrusted to him. He squandered it not only before he was accused but also after he was accused. For he altered the contracts to cheat his lord so that he could gain favor from the debtors. He was selfish and dishonest. Yet when his lord discovered what he had done he praised him because he did shrewdly. He was not praised for being selfish and dishonest. He was praised because he did shrewdly.

And that is the lesson Jesus was making. God wants us to manage our affairs honestly, but also shrewdly. Remember what Jesus said about that earlier: **"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Become ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves"** (Matthew 10:16). Those were instructions given when Jesus was sending his apostles out to proclaim that the kingdom of God was near. Nevertheless, those instructions apply to us all, because we are all the sheep of Christ who live in the midst of wolves. Ours is a world ruled by the devil. Therefore, we must live wisely, but remain innocent.

It is a serious sin for us to neglect to learn and remain ignorant. It is a serious sin if we do not cultivate our intellect. God does not "suffer fools gladly." That popular expression about suffering fools gladly is based upon something Paul said when he was rebuking his brothers at Corinth for listening to false teachers. Speaking with much irony, Paul said, **"For being wise, ye gladly tolerate the foolish. For ye tolerate it if some man enslaves you, if some man devours you, if some man seizes you, if some man lifts himself up, if some man strikes you on the face. I speak as from shame, that we were so weak. Yet in whatever any man may be bold in foolishness, I say I too am bold"** (Second Corinthians 11:19-21).

Jesus said the sons of this age are shrewder in their own generation than are the sons of light. And that is indeed another truism spoken by our Lord. For the great majority of worldly wise men are not faithful disciples of Christ. Nevertheless, notice how Jesus qualified their wisdom. He said they were shrewder in their own generation. The wise men of the world are shrewd for the affairs of whatever times and circumstances they live, but they are fools with regard to the more important and enduring spiritual things.

Mammon of unrighteousness

- **And I say to you, make friends for yourselves from the mammon of unrighteousness, so that, when ye cease, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings** (Luke 16:9).

Mammon means wealth. And when Jesus said we should make friends for ourselves with the wealth of unrighteousness, he was certainly not encouraging us to be unrighteous. What Jesus meant by the mammon of unrighteousness was the goods of this corrupted world. This is an imperfect and corrupted world, yet we must live in it.

Remember what Solomon said about this world: **“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2).

And Paul also said about it, **“For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.**

“For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now. And not only so, but also ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit. And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:20-23).

Nevertheless, even though this is a world of vanity, subject to futility, it is our duty to be fruitful and productive. God does not approve our withdrawing from the world and living in isolation like a hermit. Jesus said we are the leaven of the world. And we must use the resources of this corrupted world (the mammon of unrighteousness) righteously and wisely, whether they are natural resources or man made. That will help show we are worthy of eternal life.

God wants us to use the things of this world to labor and struggle together with him to make it a better place and bring new souls into it. Indeed, that was the very first command he gave to mankind after the Creation: **“And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it ...”** (Genesis 1:27-28).

God wants the power we have over the earth used to continue the creation process by continually improving it. When men call wilderness areas that are undeveloped by man “unspoiled” they are slandering God who commanded us to use what he created in the

world to enable us to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. Mankind does not spoil the wilderness lands when we convert them for productivity.

Moreover, we should also cultivate friends among our fellow disciples of Christ so that when we cease living here (when our flesh dies) they will welcome us in heaven, the place of eternal dwellings.

Faithfulness with little or much

- **The man faithful in the least is faithful also in much, and the man unrighteous in the least is unrighteous also in much** (Luke 16:10).

It is not how much responsibility a man has that makes him faithful or not. It is the nature of his spirit and the quality of his character. If a man proves he can be trusted with a few things, then he can be trusted with many things. If a man proves he cannot be trusted with a few things, then he cannot be trusted with many things. A poor man who takes good care of what little he has will also take good care of whatever good things he is given. While a poor man who neglects and abuses what little he has will also neglect and abuse whatever good things he is given.

That lesson has been proven time and again by the foolish things done by this modern generation that worships the philosophies of egalitarianism and humanism. Many billions of our taxpayer dollars have been, and continue to be wasted giving money and housing to poor people who have proven themselves unfaithful with the few things they have. For they virtually always squander much of their money on drugs, gambling, and other useless things. And the housing they are given degenerates rapidly.

Further proof of what Jesus said can be seen in the immigrants who have come to America recently. Many of them have become very prosperous with the greater opportunities here, because they had been faithful with what little they began with. That has happened even in our slums. And the ordinary citizens of those slums, who have proven themselves unfaithful in what they have, now resent the success of those immigrants. Rather than learn from them, they resent them.

Unfaithful men are either wicked or fools. Read my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World* to learn more about the contrasts between wise and righteous men, and wicked men and fools.

Faithful in the unrighteous mammon

- **If therefore ye did not become faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you what is true?** (Luke 16:11).

Most other versions add the word riches to the end of that sentence, but the word riches is not in the Greek manuscripts. Being entrusted with what is true may have a much broader and deeper meaning than just referring to riches. It could also include being entrusted with whatever things are of genuine and true value, such as knowledge, opportunities, responsibilities, and authority.

And if a man is not faithful with what he is given here in this world, who in heaven will entrust him with things there, which things are incorruptible, “the true”? The answer to the question Jesus asked is obviously that nobody will.

Failing to be faithful

- **And if ye did not become faithful in the alien, who will give thine to you?** (Luke 16:12).

That is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. It is not only difficult to translate from the Greek, but it is difficult to understand what it means. I translated the Greek to say “faithful in the alien.” Most other versions translate the Greek words to say something like “faithful in that which is another’s.” However, that did not make any sense to me.

Everything in this world is vain and transient, and in the bondage of corruption. The things of this world are alien to the things in heaven that are incorruptible and endure. That makes the question more meaningful. If men do not become faithful in the vain things of this world (alien to the true life of heaven), who will give them the eternal treasures that God had reserved for them in heaven? God has reserved for every one of us a wonderful inheritance in heaven. But we will not be given that heavenly inheritance if we are not faithful with what we are given in this vain life.

Nevertheless remember, God judges us by the efforts we make, our faithfulness, and not by whatever consequences may transpire. For there are circumstances beyond our control that can undermine and even destroy the fruits of our labors.

God or mammon

- **No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon** (Luke 16:13).

It is impossible to be a servant or an employee of two different men at the same time. Another application of that truism, is the fact it is impossible for a woman to live under the authority of two husbands. That is why polygamy is always polygyny: one man having more than one wife.

The application that Jesus made was about serving both God and riches. It cannot be done. Indeed, you cannot commit your love to any of the things of this world. For you will either love God and hate the things of this world, or you will love the things of this world and hate God. As the apostle John said, **“Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (First John 2:15).

Matthew also records Jesus saying to his disciples, **“Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of God difficultly”** (Matthew 19:23). Luke also spoke of that farther on. We cannot serve God and mammon.

What is lofty among men

- **And the Pharisees, being lovers of money, heard all these things, and they sneered him. And he said to them, Ye are those who declare yourselves righteous in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. Because what is lofty among men is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:14-15).**

Those Pharisees were self-righteous hypocrites. And because they were lovers of money they sneered at what Jesus was saying. They could not learn because they were too proud of themselves. Thus, they remained lost before God.

Regarding lofty things among men, the longer I live in this world and see how people live, and the more I learn about the word of God, the more I can see that what is lofty among men is indeed an abomination in the sight of God.

Paul also said, **“For do I now trust men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I were still pleasing men I would not be a bondman of Christ”** (Galatians 1:10). If Paul had been pleasing men he could not be pleasing to Christ, because what Jesus said is not popular among men.

The kingdom treated aggressively

- **The law and the prophets were until John. From that time the kingdom of God is proclaimed good news, and every man in it is treated aggressively (Luke 16:16).**

Remember, the law and the prophets refer to the teachings of the Old Testament. And with the coming of Jesus the Christ (beginning with John the immerser who prepared the people for him), the kingdom of God was proclaimed good news. It is good news because of many reasons. It enables us to be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins; it defeated the devil and all of God’s enemies; it freed us from the bondage of a legal system with God; it revealed to us what God is really like; it gives us the hope of becoming sons of God for eternity with him in heaven.

Nevertheless, Jesus said that every man in the kingdom of God is treated aggressively. Examples of that are told in the book of Acts which gives the history of the early church. Therefore, prepare yourself to be treated aggressively if you want to be in the kingdom of God as a faithful disciple of Christ.

The law

- **But it is easier for the heaven and the earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall (Luke 16:17).**

During his ministry on the earth Jesus emphasized the importance of obeying all the law and the prophets (meaning the teachings of the Old Testament). However, the law is now obsolete and no longer in effect.

Speaking about the ministry of Christ, the author of Hebrews said, **“But now he has obtained a superior ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a superior cov-**

enant, which has been enacted upon superior promises. For if that first one was faultless, no place would have been sought for a second.

“For, finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, and I will perfect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by my hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

“Because this is the covenant that I will ordain with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, giving my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be to them for a God, and they will be to me for a people. And they will, no, not teach each man his fellow citizen, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because all will know me, from their small as far as their great. Because I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins and their lawlessness I will no, not further remember.

“In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance” (Hebrews 8:6-13).

That which was becoming old and obsolete and near disappearance was the law of Moses. The sinful Jews rejected Christ and were keeping the law of Moses (a semblance of it for the majority of them). But God sent the Roman army, forty years after Jesus began his ministry, to destroy their nation, Jerusalem, and the temple, and make it impossible for anyone now to obey the law of Moses.

Nevertheless, until Jesus successfully completed his life of perfect obedience to God, the law of Moses was still in full effect for them. Hence, Jesus emphasized the importance of obeying all of it, which he himself did.

Divorce

- **Every man who divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery, and every man who marries her who has been divorced from a husband commits adultery** (Luke 16:18).

Remember, the commands that Jesus gave were for his disciples, not for the rest of the world. The commands that he gave us are much stricter than the laws of nations that are enforced by worldly authorities. Remember for example, his command against swearing (see Matthew 5:34). A strict legalistic application of his command about swearing would condemn us every time we signed our name to a legal document or promissory note, which are forms of swearing.

Therefore, we cannot apply what Jesus said about divorce to people who are not his disciples. I must remind you of that because of all the complications and extenuating circumstances about marriage and divorce that occur in this sinful world.

For example, would God condemn a new disciple as guilty of adultery if he had married a divorced woman before he ever became a disciple? Would God approve such a new disciple divorcing his wife if they had lived together faithfully for many years and had many children? Should such a new disciple abandon his family, and create what would amount

to a widow with orphans? Did God condemn David for eating the bread of the presentation, which was for the priests only (see Matthew 12:3-4)? The answers to those all questions is, No.

Therefore, the command Jesus gave that is quoted in the above passage is (like swearing) an ideal that should apply to his disciples when they are his disciples, and only then. That means any Christian who divorces his Christian wife and marries another woman becomes guilty of adultery, because God does not recognize divorce between Christians.

Likewise any man who marries a Christian woman who was divorced from her Christian husband becomes guilty of adultery, because God does not recognize divorce between Christians. And that law no doubt also applies to wives who divorce their husbands.

In the sight of God marriage is for life. The only exception is the one Jesus gave that is recorded in Matthew's biography of Jesus: **"... whoever may divorce his wife apart from a matter of fornication ..."** (Matthew 5:31-32). If either the Christian husband or the Christian wife commit fornication, in the sight of God they can be divorced, but the guilty Christian cannot remarry.

Lazarus and the rich man

- **Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously daily. But there was a certain poor man named Lazarus, who had been placed near his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But even the dogs that came licked his sores.**
- **And it came to pass for the poor man to die and be carried by the agents to Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried. And having lifted up his eyes in Hades, being in torments, he sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus by his bosom. And having cried out, he said, Father Abraham, be merciful to me, and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame.**
- **But Abraham said, Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now here he is comforted and thou are in agony. And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those here who want to cross over to you are not able, nor may those go across from there to us (Luke 16:19-26).**

Many people think the parables of Jesus were fables. But I have no doubt they were all factual, including this one about the rich man and Lazarus. Regarding Hades, it is a general term meaning the place of the dead. For example, consider this passage about Jesus: **"Having indeed been killed in flesh, but made alive in spirit, in which also, having gone, he preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient formerly, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah who prepared an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water"** (First Peter 3:18-20).

Those were the spirits of souls who had perished in the great flood. And the prison Peter mentioned was just another example of Hades (although it was not identified). There is much mystery about what Peter said, which I try to explain in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. In that book I also say much more about Hades and hell.

The parable about the rich man and Lazarus teaches us that the spirits of sinners (at least some of them) are going to be kept in some kind of prison before the great day of judgment. What Jesus called Hades in this parable was probably that prison. And as the parable says, it will be like hell because it will involve torment from flames.

The rich man had shown no mercy to the poor man, Lazarus, who had been suffering so much. Therefore, God showed no mercy to the rich man in the afterlife. As James said, **“For the judgment is merciless to him who did no mercy”** (James 2:13). And there is a great chasm fixed between where the righteous will be (probably in paradise) and Hades, so that they cannot show mercy to the merciless either. That is the judgment of God.

The rich man wanted his brothers warned

- **And he said, I beg thee therefore, father, that thou would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment** (Luke 16:27-28).

The rich man certainly loved his brothers. He was apparently not a wicked man, but he was selfish and inconsiderate to others beyond his family. Notice also how the rich man did not protest about being in Hades; he merely asked for a little relief. Apparently in the afterlife some souls will be judged to some degree even before the great day of judgment. And the sinners will be cast into Hades (which is probably the prison that Peter spoke about). The sinners will probably be given the explanation why they were condemned. That may be why the rich man did not protest about being there.

Not accepting the Bible

- **But Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, No, father Abraham, but if some man would go to them from the dead they will repent. And he said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead** (Luke 16:29-31).

The writings of Moses and the prophets were what comprised the Old Testament, which is the only part of the Bible they had at the time of Jesus. Therefore, Abraham was telling the rich man that his brothers had the Bible and they should read it. However, the rich man thought if Lazarus rose from the dead to warn them, that would be effective. Abraham said that would be no better than having the Bible.

The lesson for us is that if a man will not accept what the Bible says, then not even a miracle like a man rising from the dead would persuade him. And that reminds me of time when I was a young man. I spoke with an older neighbor who was an atheist, and I asked him if he would believe in God if an agent from heaven appeared to him (I used the word angel then). He said if that happened he would just think he was drunk.

Notice how the rich man addressed Abraham as “father Abraham.” However, Jesus commanded, **“But be ye not designated Rabbi, for one is your leader, the Christ, and ye are all brothers. And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your Father, he in the heavens. And be ye not designated leaders, for one is your leader, the Christ”** (Matthew 23:8-10).

Abraham was indeed a father to the rich man, because he was the founding father of the Hebrew race. In contrast, Jesus was referring to titles given to men. See my comments about that passage in Matthew for more of what I say about such things.

Punishment for stumbling-blocks

- **And he said to his disciples, It is impossible for the stumbling-blocks not to come, but woe to him through whom they come! It is better for him if a donkey-powered millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble** (Luke 17:1-2).

The devil (in the form of a serpent) caused the innocent Eve to stumble by encouraging her to sin, and he was cursed because of it (see Genesis 3:14-15). Jesus uttered a curse against anyone who encourages a child to commit wrong. He said that whoever did would be better dying a violent death.

He also said it was impossible for the stumbling-blocks (temptations) not to come. They are necessary in order for us to be tested. And we must be tested in order to show our worthiness for eternal salvation. Remember, even Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, was tested that way. Only men have the opportunity to become sons of God for eternity by living in this evil world filled with temptations. Therefore, we need to be tested to prove our worthiness. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Nevertheless, a great curse is upon every man through whom stumbling-blocks come. Such men allow themselves of their own free will to become servants of the devil, and they will suffer the same punishment he will.

Forgiving a brother

- **Take heed to yourselves. And if thy brother should sin against thee, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he should sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times in the day turn back, saying, I repent, thou will forgive him** (Luke 17:3-4).

The concept of forgiveness has been enormously perverted in this decadent and permissive generation of Americans. They have popularized the idea that forgiveness means the guilty party is spared all punishment. That is not the kind of forgiveness Jesus commanded us. Notice first that his command refers to forgiveness among brothers, not the forgiveness of every criminal and vicious offender.

Second, forgiveness in the Bible never means the complete absence of punishment and required recompense. For example, God forgave Moses but he still punished him (see

Deuteronomy 3:23-27). God forgave Moses' sister Miriam but he still punished her (see Numbers 12:10-15). God forgave the ancient Israelites in the wilderness but he still cursed that generation to die there (see Numbers 14:20-23).

Forgiveness means we should accept the guilty brother and not reject him from fellowship. Nevertheless, it still requires the guilty brother to suffer some kind of consequence. There is much to say about forgiveness, of which you can read in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*. Do not be caught in the modern trap of the devil and believe you are obligated to forgive men of even the most heinous crimes. It is a vicious lie, and the disciples of the devil and those deluded by him love to promote it.

Consider these words of the author of Hebrews: **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”** (Hebrews 12:6-7). And Jesus himself said, **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent”** (Revelation 3:19). If God chastens those he loves when they sin, what do you think he does to the wicked, those he does not love?

The power of faith

- **And the apostles said to the Lord, Increase faith for us. And the Lord said, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard plant, ye would say to this sycamine tree, Be thou uprooted and be planted in the sea, and it would have obeyed you** (Luke 17:5-6).

What the apostles meant by asking Jesus to increase their faith was their trust in God. People can believe in God, but still not have much trust in him. For example, they can blame him when bad things happen. They can doubt he will do things for them. They can be indifferent to some of his commands.

Throughout his ministry Jesus told his apostles many things about God to help them increase their faith. Moreover, he did many things to demonstrate the power of faith. Nevertheless, it is the personal responsibility of each man to increase his faith. And that is done from knowledge of the word of God, because Paul said, **“So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

Jesus told how faith, a trusting faith, even as small as a grain of a mustard plant, has much power. Not only could they command a tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, but they could even command mountains to be removed. For Matthew tells how Jesus said, **“For truly I say to you, if ye have faith as a grain of a mustard plant, ye will say to this mountain, Remove from here to there, and it will depart, and nothing will be impossible to you”** (Matthew 17:20).

Yet I believe the greatest power of faith is to transform the lives of men. Therefore, strive with all your energy to increase your faith and trust in God and his holy word. It will transform your life and make it better than you could imagine; not necessarily in worldly things, but in the enduring spiritual things.

The duty of bondmen

- **But which of you having a bondman plowing or feeding livestock, who, when he comes in from the field, will straightaway say, After coming near, sit down? Will he not rather say to him, Prepare what I may dine, and having gird thyself, serve me until I eat and drink, and after these things thou will eat and drink?**
- **Does he have a favor for that bondman because he did the things that were commanded? I think not. Thus ye also, when ye did all the things that were commanded you, say, We are unprofitable bondmen, because we have done what we are obligated to do” (Luke 17:7-10).**

God not only created us, but the power of his Spirit is what keeps us alive. Indeed, God created the entire universe, and the power of his Spirit is what keeps it energized. He owes us nothing, but we owe him everything. (I speak much more about the sustaining power of his Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.)

Since God both created us and continually sustains us, then our duty is to serve him faithfully, without expecting any special recognition. Acknowledging what Jesus said in the above passage should help keep us properly humble and obedient. For we are duty bound to be humbly obedient, and we deserve no thanks for any of our service to him. Be not puffed up because of the great blessings of his grace. Be always thankful and ever more zealous to please him.

Cleansing ten lepers

- **And it came to pass as he went to Jerusalem, that he was passing through the middle of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, ten leprous men who stood from afar met him. And they raised a voice, saying, Jesus, Master, be merciful to us. And when he saw them, he said to them, After departing, display yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, during their going they were cleansed.**
- **And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back with a great voice glorifying God. And he fell upon his face beside his feet giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. And having answered, Jesus said, Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner? And he said to him, After rising, go. Thy faith has healed thee (Luke 17:11-19).**

Men who claim the power to heal blame those who are not healed by them for not having enough faith. That is not what Jesus meant by faith healing a man. The leprous man's faith healed him because he had enough faith in Jesus to come and ask to be healed. That is all the faith anyone needed to be healed by Jesus.

Nevertheless, no man after the time of the early church has the power of miraculous healing. Blaming the disabled for not having enough faith is a cruel excuse used to cover the

inability of those liars to heal them. And those they seem to heal are not really healed, but are examples of the power of illusion. Those evil men prey upon the ignorance and the desperation of the sick and afflicted. They are truly wolves in sheep's clothing.

Jesus commanded those ten lepers to display themselves to the priests because that was a requirement of the law when lepers were healed (see Leviticus 14).

Jesus referred to the Samaritan as a foreigner. Samaritans were half-breed Jews who were not recognized as being legitimate members of Israel because they had intermarried with the Gentiles.

The ingratitude of the nine is characteristic of the world. They gladly accept the Lord's blessings, but they will not show appreciation to him. Even when he answers their prayers most of them fail to express their gratitude. As children of God, the first thing we should do when we see that he has answered our prayers is to express gratitude to him. Indeed, we should always express our thanks to him for the many daily blessings we receive from him.

The kingdom is inside of us

- **And questioned by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God comes, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! For behold, the kingdom of God is inside of you (Luke 17:20-21).**

The kingdom of God is spiritual, and spiritual things are not visible with the eyes of our flesh. The church of Jesus Christ is the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God. And being spiritual it cannot be seen with the eyes of our flesh.

The kingdom of God is a spiritual organization whose members have God's Holy Spirit within them. And since the word church means an assembly, a congregation, or a gathering, then wherever his disciples meet in his name, that is a church. For Jesus said, **"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"** (Matthew 18:20). We can see them assembled. But only the authentic ones comprise the kingdom, and that cannot be seen, because it is within us. God sees it but we cannot.

Moreover, like leaven in a lump of dough, the kingdom of God is spread throughout the world. And it cannot be identified with any particular place or country because it is an international brotherhood that is scattered throughout the world. It is a spiritual nation within all the nations, although in some of them more, and in some of them less. And remember, although it is in the world, it is not of the world (see John 15:19).

Recognizing the return of Christ

- **And he said to the disciples, The days will come when ye will long to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye will not see it. And they will say to you, Lo, here! Lo, there! Do not depart, nor pursue. For just as the lightning, its flashing from under the sky to under the sky, illuminates, so will the Son of man be in his day (Luke 17:22-24).**

Although we his disciples of later generations were never privileged to see Jesus when he was on the earth, yet all of us long to see him. Jesus warned his disciples that after he was gone they would never see him again until the end of the world. And then the whole world would see him the same way that lightning brightens the whole sky.

A very popular belief today, indeed a longing by believers, is that Jesus is soon returning to the earth to set up a worldly kingdom in Jerusalem and reign over the world there. But there are many passages of scripture, including the one above, that says that will never happen. Our longing should be for our kingdom in heaven and the new Jerusalem there, not a physical kingdom here with Jesus reigning at the old Jerusalem.

The end will come unexpectedly

- **But first it is necessary for him to suffer many things and be rejected from this generation.**
- **And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.**
- **And likewise as it happened in the days of Lot. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But in that day Lot went out from Sodom he rained fire and brimstone from the sky, and destroyed them all. It will be according to these things in that day the Son of man is revealed (Luke 17:25-30).**

The suffering and rejection of Jesus was necessary for him to become our redeemer and save our souls from condemnation. However, his disciples did not understand those things until after his ascension into heaven and the church was established.

Jesus used the example of the great flood that destroyed all the people, and also of the fire and brimstone that destroyed Sodom. His lesson was that the end was going to come quickly and without warning. Just as people were living normally before those examples of destruction, so people will be living normally just before Jesus is revealed at the end of the world.

See Genesis 6:1-8 for the story about why God destroyed the population of the world with the great flood but he saved Noah. And see Genesis 19 for the story about why God destroyed Sodom but he rescued the righteous man Lot who had been living there.

Warning about the coming destruction

- **In that day, he who will be on the housetop, and his vessels in the house, let him not go down to take them up. And let him who is in the field likewise not return for the things behind. Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:31-32).**

Jesus was here speaking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. And he warned that it would be so swift (the siege of Jerusalem) that they should abandon everything and flee as

soon as they saw it beginning. His reminder about Lot's wife was another warning. The agents from heaven who brought Lot and his family out of Sodom the day of its destruction told them not to look back. Lot's wife ignored that command, and she was turned into a pillar of salt (see Genesis 19:26).

The lesson for Jesus' disciples was that if they ignored Jesus' warning about trying to salvage their belongings, they too would perish. They would perish, not because of the swiftness of the conquest by the Roman army, but because the fanatical Jews kept everyone in the city and would not allow any to escape. They kept everyone there to help fight the Roman army. That was why Jesus' disciples needed to escape out of the city as quickly as possible. For the people of the city suffered enormously, first by famine caused by the siege, and then by the vicious Roman army when they conquered it.

Losing our lives to save them

- **Whoever will seek to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose it will keep it alive** (Luke 17:33).

Luke reported similar words earlier, when Jesus said, **"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever may lose his life because of me, this man will save it"** (Luke 9:24). That means we must give up everything that is not part of his righteousness, everything that is selfish about us, everything that is an advantage to us in this world of sin.

It is only by losing our lives for the cause of Christ and his good news that we will save it. Losing our lives that way enables us to find eternal life. For Jesus said to the Jews, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age"** (John 8:51). That is truly finding life.

One taken and one left

- **I say to you, in that night there will be two in one bed. The one man will be taken, and the other man will be left. Two will be grinding together. The one woman will be taken, and the other woman will be left.**
- **And having answered, they say to him, Where, Lord? And he said to them, Where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered together** (Luke 17:34-37).¹

Jesus was here speaking about the end of the world when Jesus will take his faithful disciples to be in heaven with him. Jesus said the world would end both in the day and the night, because it involves the whole world. There will be men in bed during the night when the final separation will be made. And there will also be women grinding at the mill, which work is done in the daytime. The end coming both in the day and the night is

1. Note: Luke 17:36 was omitted from the ACV Bible because it is not in the majority of the Greek manuscripts.

because the end will affect the entire planet, where every day contains both day and night. At any time, day is always on one half of the planet and night is always on the other half.

His answer about where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered together, is a riddle. His disciples were asking him where the man and the woman who were chosen would be taken. Their question clearly indicates they did not understand what he was teaching. And that was true of many things he taught them. They did not understand until he was gone from the world. Nevertheless, they did later understand most of what he taught, and it helped them live better.

The answer Jesus gave about the vultures seems to have been about the man and the woman who were left, not the man and woman who were taken. For our spirits will be taken to heaven, not our bodies. Therefore, those who remain in their bodies will die and be devoured. That answer may have been given to help frighten us into always being prepared. For vultures are symbols of death because they devour and consume the bodies of the dead.

Persisting in our righteous requests

- **And he also spoke a parable to them about it being necessary to always pray, and not to give up, saying, In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God, and did not regard man. And a widow was in that city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent.**
- **And for a time he would not, but after these things he said within himself, Although I fear not God, and regard not man, yet because this widow causes me a beating, I will avenge her, lest by no end of coming she give me a black eye (Luke 18:1-5).**

That is a lesson about being persistent when your cause is good and right and just. It was not only that the widow was persistent, but her request was justified. That parable teaches us that a cause which is justified has great power to persuade, especially when we are persistent about it. Therefore, we should never be discouraged when we are refused and ignored, even when the authorities are as callous as the judge in the parable. What Jesus was teaching is that we should persevere in our requests to God, because persistence is more persuasive.

Another lesson in that parable is that there is nothing wrong with demanding vengeance. Vengeance is justice. That is why it is hated and condemned by this degenerate and permissive generation. The Bible supports vengeance. However, both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach us that we are not to take personal vengeance. For God said, **“Vengeance is for me”** (Deuteronomy 32:35 and Romans 12:19)). Therefore, we should seek our vengeance (justice) through the proper authorities, whether it be God or worldly authorities. For God does use worldly authorities when applying his vengeance (see for example, Romans 13:3-4).

The words about the widow giving the judge a beating and a black eye, are of course, figurative. But they do illustrate well how powerful a just cause is when it is pursued humbly and persistently.

Vengeance for us

- **And the Lord said, Hear ye what the unrighteous judge says. And God, will he, no, not do the vengeance of his chosen who cry out to him day and night, and yet being patient toward them? I say to you, that he will do their vengeance speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he then find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:6-8).**

Notice how the Lord said that he would do vengeance for us who cry out to him day and night. Let not sinners, and others who are deceived by them, condemn you for crying out for vengeance when your cause is just. Jesus did not condemn it; he encouraged it. People have greatly misinterpreted what Jesus said about forgiving our enemies. Minor offenses can be forgiven, but major offences need to be avenged. For vengeance is justice, and Jesus is saying in the parable that God approves our crying out for it.

Consider this passage from the book of Revelation: **“And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony of the Lamb that they held. And they cried out in a great voice, saying, Master, Holy and True, how long do thou not judge and avenge our blood from those who dwell on the earth? And a white robe was given to them each, and it was said to them that they should still rest a time, until also their fellow bondmen, and their brothers, and those going to be killed as they too, would be fulfilled”** (Revelation 6:9-11).

Notice how those souls underneath the altar in heaven were not rebuked for crying out for vengeance. For vengeance is justice, and God loves justice.

The part of that passage in Luke about being patient toward us seems to mean that God is patient toward us as we cry out to him. He is not like the unrighteous judge, because God listens to us patiently. And he avenges us speedily in the ways that he judges best. We can be angry about injustice (God himself is angry about it), but we should never fret or be frustrated when we seek justice. Simply persist and be patient, trusting the justice of God.

Self-righteous or repentant

- **And he also spoke this parable to some of those who were persuaded in themselves that they were righteous, and disdained other men. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. Having stood by himself, the Pharisee prayed these things: God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, predatory, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice of the week. I tithe all things, as many as I acquire.**
- **But the tax collector, having stood from afar, would not even lift his eyes to the sky, but beat upon his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinful man. I say to you, this man went down to his house justified rather than that man (Luke 18:9-13).**

In the above parable Jesus is teaching the kind of attitude we should have about ourselves and other people. God wants us to be righteous both in our actions and in our minds. Remember how Jesus condemned many of the Pharisees because they emphasized outward righteousness, while the inside of them was full of evil, saying to them, **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness”** (Matthew 23:27).

The Pharisee in the above parable was rightly proud of not being a wicked man; he was not predatory, unjust, or an adulterer. Nor was he employed in work that the people disapproved, such as being a tax collector for the Romans. Moreover, he fasted frequently and he tithed faithfully. Nevertheless, regardless of all those things, he was an arrogant and self-righteous man who disdained other men. Therefore, Jesus said the man was not justified before God. He was not justified because he was so self-righteous.

In contrast, the tax collector chastened himself and confessed that he was a sinful man, asking God for mercy. That tax collector may have been like the prodigal son who repented and returned to his father to ask him for mercy. Therefore, Jesus said he returned to his house justified (by God). On the other hand, he may not have been any less righteous than that Pharisee. He may have just been more conscious of his sins. Perhaps it was some combination of those reasons. What was important was that he confessed his sins humbly before God and repented.

There are no commands about how we are to look or position ourselves when we pray. Here is what Solomon did when he prayed during his dedication of the temple: **“And he [Solomon] stood before the altar of Jehovah in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands. For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold, five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court.**

“And upon it he stood, and knelt down upon his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven. And he said, O Jehovah, the God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven, or on earth, who keep covenant and loving kindness with thy servants, who walk before thee with all their heart ...” (Second Chronicles 6:12-14).

Jesus often looked up to heaven when he prayed, but sometimes he knelt. That tax collector would not even lift his eyes to the sky when he prayed. And because Jesus approved of how that tax collector prayed, it has become traditional for most all of us to bow before God when we pray.

Regarding the occupation of a tax collector, the people of Israel held them in great contempt because they were collecting for the Roman rulers, who were deeply resented by the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus never condemned the tax collectors. They were doing a very unpopular job, but it was a necessary one. For the Romans were going to get financial support from the people one way or another.

Of course, there was probably more potential for abuse by those tax collectors. Remember what happened when the tax collectors came to John the immerser to be immersed by him: **“And tax collectors also came to be immersed, and they said to him, Teacher, what**

should we do? And he said to them, Collect not one thing more than from what has been appointed for you” (Luke 3:12-13).

Regarding the matter of fasting, a fast is a time of not eating. We all spend some time fasting. For example, the first meal after a night of sleeping is called breakfast, which word is a combination of “break” and “fast.” That meal is called breakfast because we break our night of fasting. Nevertheless, we ordinarily think of fasting as not eating during a time of normal eating. Many people think fasting must be at least a day long. However, skipping one meal is still fasting. Hence, I believe what that Pharisee meant by fasting twice of the week was skipping two meals each week, not fasting for two full days each week.

Lifting or lowering yourself

- **Because every man who lifts himself up will be made lower, and he who makes himself lower will be lifted up (Luke 18:14).**

That is the second time Luke records Jesus saying those words. The first time was when he taught the lesson about taking the lower seat when you are invited to a wedding festivity. Being humble is a virtue that is taught throughout the Bible. And it clearly teaches that the proud will be made lower, while the humble will be lifted up. It will be that way because God will cause it to happen. It may take a while, but eventually **“every man who lifts himself up will be made lower, and he who makes himself lower will be lifted up.”**

Allowing children to come to him

- **And they were also bringing the infants to him, so that he would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But having summoned them, Jesus said, Allow the children to come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, will, no, not enter into it (Luke 18:15-17).**

Jesus never turned the children away from him. And he used the occasion to again teach what we must be like to belong to the kingdom of God. When Jesus said about children, **“of such is the kingdom of the God,”** he did not, of course, mean the kingdom of God was composed only of children.

We must be as a child, because Jesus said whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it. That means to enter the kingdom we must become as children in the nature of our spirit: innocent (in the sense of having repented of sin), humble, open-minded, eager to learn, quick to forgive and forget minor offenses.

He did not mean that we should become as children in our intellectual development and emotional control. As Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I reasoned as a child, but when I became a man, I abolished the childish things”** (First Corinthians 13:11), and, **“Brothers, become not children in your thoughts. Instead be childlike in wickedness, but in your thoughts become mature”** (First Corinthians 14:20).

No man who lacks the kind of childlike spirit that Jesus referred to will ever enter into the kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus even said that those who make themselves the humblest and the lowliest among us are the greater in the kingdom. That is the very opposite of what happens in the world. It is the most proud and self-promoting men who become the greater within the peoples of the world.

None is good except God

- **And a certain ruler questioned him, saying, Good teacher, having done what, will I inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, Why do thou call me good? None is good except one, God (Luke 18:18-19).**

That is more evidence that Jesus is not fully equal with God the Father. He confessed that fact numerous times, many of which are recorded in the biography of him written by the apostle John. Only God the Father is absolutely “good” in every way (meaning perfect in wisdom and power and all things right, good, and just). For example, God can never be tempted (see James 1:13), but Jesus certainly was.

Be obedient and sacrificial

- **Thou know the commandments. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not murder. Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not give false testimony. Honor thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these things I have kept from my youth.**
- **And when he heard these things, Jesus said to him, Yet one thing is lacking from thee. Sell all things, as many as thou have, and distribute to the poor, and thou will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. But when he heard these things, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich (Luke 18:20-23).**

In answer to his question about entering into life, Jesus quoted some of the ten commandments. The man said he had kept all those things from his youth. In this report Jesus said, **“Yet one thing is lacking from thee.”** However in Matthew’s biography of Jesus, he said, **“If thou want to be perfect”** And in Mark’s biography of Jesus, he said, **“One thing thou lack.”** The main difference in the wording is with the record in Matthew. The difference in the wording in Mark and Luke is insignificant, because they say virtually the same thing.

The explanation is that Jesus no doubt said both of those things; namely wanting to be perfect and lacking one thing. Consider this example: The sign placed on the cross of Jesus is also recorded differently in the four biographies of him. In Matthew the inscription says, **“THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Matthew 27:37). In Mark it says, **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Mark 15:26). In Luke it says, **“THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Luke 23:38). And in John it says, **“JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (John 19:19).

Notice how they all differ in some way. What the complete inscription no doubt said, was THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Each of the biographers simply omitted part of the inscription. However, all four of them included the words “The King of the Jews.” That was the most important part of the inscription. The things each of them omitted were incidental parts, such as the fact he was a Nazarene or that his name was Jesus. The great fact was that he is truly the King of the Jews. Indeed, the Bible says he is “**Lord of lords and King of kings**” (Revelation 17:14).

Those differences in the inscription present a very important lesson about reading the Bible record. Look for the important things recorded, and let not scoffers discourage you about insignificant differences you may find. God tests us in many ways, and such things are just another way he tests our faith in his holy word. Such things enable scoffers to justify themselves, but they also enable believers to search more diligently to find the truth of what it says.

Therefore, regarding what Jesus said to the rich man, I am convinced that each recorder simply reported only part of his words. Thus, all of the words can be revealed by reading all of the reports. Putting the words together, Jesus probably said something like, “One thing thou lack, because if thou want to be perfect then”

The man’s need to forsake his love of money was the one thing he lacked to be perfect, and Jesus knew it. Thus, Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor so he would have treasure in heaven, and come follow him. However, that was too difficult for the man, and so he departed, sorrowing.

Our willingness to “lose our life” for Jesus is another way God tests our souls. We all need to examine our lives to see if there is anything that would be a stumbling block in our obedience and service. Jesus certainly does not want each one of us to sell everything we own, give to the poor, and spend the rest of our lives evangelizing. That was the requirement of the rich man, because it was his greatest stumbling block. And it did prevent him from following Christ.

Rich men enter the kingdom difficultly

- **And having seen him become very sorrowful, Jesus said, How difficultly those who have riches will enter into the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to enter in through the hole of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24-24).**

Remember, Jesus said that where our treasure is there will our heart be also. The heart of the rich is with their wealth and with the great advantages and privileges it gives them. They have much more to sacrifice in order to enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, their great wealth is a stumbling block to them. And the history of the world proves what Jesus said about them. Very few men of great wealth have ever genuinely committed themselves to Christ. The sacrifices required are too much for such men.

Regarding the hole of a needle, every other translation that I know about says Jesus spoke about the eye of a needle. However, the original Greek says nothing about an eye of a needle. It says the hole of a needle. It may sound more poetic to say the eye of a needle instead of the hole of a needle, but that is just another example of how men change what

the word of God says to make it more appealing to men. Men may be pleased with such changes but God is very displeased. And I seek to please him, not men.

Who can be saved

- **And those who heard it said, And who can be saved? And he said, The things impossible with men are possible with God (Luke 18:26-27).**

The world thinks rich men are somehow superior. But the word of God does not say they are. For example, Solomon said, **“The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out”** (Proverbs 28:11). Indeed, in the eyes of God rich men are inferior. For example, Jesus said, **“However, woe to you the rich, because ye have received your consolation”** (Luke 6:24).

His disciples probably thought rich men were superior, which would explain why they were exceedingly amazed at what Jesus said about the salvation of rich men. However, Jesus did not explain about rich men. He used the occasion to teach them how salvation is impossible for all men. No man has or ever will have the power to save his soul. Only God has that power. God can do it because **“with God all things are possible”** (Matthew 19:26).

Saving the souls of those who love him, while condemning the souls of those who hate him was probably considered impossible if God was going to always be just. The reason is because all men sin. Therefore, if God is going to condemn those who sin, he must condemn those who love him as well as those who hate him.

That was God’s dilemma before he sent his Son into the world. However, by living a sinless life of perfect obedience in this sinful world, Jesus was rewarded with the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. Hence, through his Son Jesus Christ, God did what seemed impossible: the salvation of our souls and the condemnation of unrepentant sinners—all with complete justice. And that defeated all of his enemies.

Rewards for our sacrifices

- **And Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee. And he said to them, Truly I say to you, that there is no man who has left house, or parents, or brothers, or wife, or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will, no, not receive back manifold more in this time, and in the coming age eternal life (Luke 18:28-30).**

Not only will the followers of Jesus receive eternal life, but they will receive special blessings here upon the earth for making sacrifices for the sake of the kingdom. And what Jesus said suggests that those who forsake the most for him and the good news will receive the most compensation. Giving up for his sake our houses, or our lands, or any of our closest kin will result in a manifold blessing now and eternal life in the end. Therefore, our compensation for such sacrifices will be much greater than what we give up, manifold greater.

Peter reminded Jesus that his apostles had left all, and had followed him. And the record shows how they are a good example of the compensation Jesus mentioned. They were all

excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue, thus alienating many if not most of their kinfolk. However, they were embraced and loved by their fellow Christians in the kingdom of God, which number was much larger than their kinfolk.

Nevertheless, that promised reward Jesus gave requires an enormous amount of faith. It takes great faith to leave the persons and things nearest to us. There are not many people who do it. Remember however, not all of us will need to leave those things because of Jesus, and because of the good news. That promise is reserved for those who will need to make that sacrifice.

Jesus again prophesies his death and resurrection

- **And having taken along the twelve, he said to them, Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets about the Son of man will be completed. For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, and he will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. And after scourging, they will kill him, and the third day he will rise up** (Luke 18:31-33).

Jesus again warned his apostles about the ordeals he would suffer at the hands of men. Nevertheless, he always told them he would rise up the third day. And as Jesus suffered at the hands of men, so we too will suffer by them if we remain faithful to Christ. For he said, **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world (instead I chose you out of the world), because of this the world hates you”** (John 15:18-19).

Luke also quoted Jesus saying that all the things that were written through the prophets about him would be completed. And his biographers all mentioned those prophesied things when they described what happened at the end of his earthly life.

They did not understand

- **And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not understand the things that were said** (Luke 18:34).

Those men obviously did not apply the following prophecy to the Messiah, and modern Jews still do not: **“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.**

“He was despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as him from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:1-5).

Luke said what Jesus told them about his suffering was hidden from them, so that they did not understand any of those things. It was apparently hidden from them because they expected the Christ to be a great warrior-king like David who would reign over the nation of Israel. Therefore, if Jesus was the Christ, how could he suffer those things and be killed? They did not understand how the Christ of God was much greater than a warrior-king of Israel.

Jesus heals a persistent blind man

- **And it came to pass as he approached Jericho, a certain blind man sat beside the road begging. And having heard a multitude going by, he inquired what this may be. And they informed him that Jesus the Nazarene passes by. And he cried out, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, be merciful to me. And those who went ahead rebuked him, so that he would be quiet, but he cried out much more, Thou son of David, be merciful to me.**
- **And having stood still, Jesus commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he questioned him, saying, What do thou want I would do to thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive sight. And Jesus said to him, Receive sight. Thy faith has healed thee. And immediately he received sight, and followed him glorifying God. And all the people when they saw it gave praise to God (Luke 18:35-43).**

Matthew gives a very similar story, but says there were two blind men. In Matthew their names were not given, and the story there says nothing about throwing off a garment. It also says they addressed Jesus as Lord, instead of Rabboni. The story in Mark is very similar to this one in Luke, although it also says the blind man addressed Jesus as Rabboni. Otherwise, everything else in the stories are about the same.

Nevertheless, although there are many similarities in the stories, the reports in Matthew and Luke are probably about different men on two different occasions. It was very common for blind men to sit by the wayside and beg. And by that time Jesus' reputation as a healer was well known. Hence, desperate men, like those who were blind and begging by the wayside, were going to cry out for mercy when they heard him passing by. And it was not uncommon for Jesus to ask people what they wanted of him, even when he knew of their infirmity.

Remember what John said about the things Jesus did: **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25). Moreover, the biographers of him did not always report the same events. Hence, be not troubled by different reports that vary about what seems to be the same thing.

Zacchaeus the small man

- **And having entered, he was passing through Jericho. And behold, a man called by name, Zacchaeus. And he was a chief tax collector, and this man**

was rich. And he sought to see Jesus, who he was. And he was not able because of the crowd, because his stature was small. And having ran ahead, he climbed up in a sycamore tree so that he might see him, because he was going to pass that one.

- And when Jesus came to the place, having looked up, he saw him, and said to him, Zacchaeus, after making haste, come down, for today I must lodge at thy house. And having made haste, he came down and received him, rejoicing.
- And all who saw murmured, saying, He went in to relax with a sinful man. And having stood, Zacchaeus said to the Lord, Behold, half of the things possessed by me, Lord, I give to the poor. And if I defrauded any man of anything, I repay fourfold.
- And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:1-10).

Although Zacchaeus was physically limited because of his small size, he did not let it keep him from seeing Jesus. He used both his intelligence and his energy to find a way to see the Lord. And Jesus always respected such men. That may be the reason Jesus chose to lodge at his house.

Jesus did not ask Zacchaeus if he could lodge at this house; he said he must lodge at his house. When Jesus made that decision is not told. However, I suspect it was made in response to Zacchaeus' efforts to see him. For God rewards our zeal to learn about him.

The crowd disapproved Jesus lodging with Zacchaeus, accusing Zacchaeus of being a sinful man. However, the Lord did not accuse him. Moreover, Zacchaeus defended himself by telling how generous to the poor he was, and that he would compensate fourfold any man he might have defrauded.

That fourfold amount that Zacchaeus said he would pay to any man he may have defrauded is based upon this command of the law of Moses: **"If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep"** (Exodus 22:1). Notice how Zacchaeus said, **"And if I defrauded ..."** He did not say he had defrauded any man. Too many people, like those ancient Jews, have condemned Zacchaeus as a big sinner, but the record never says he was.

Regarding the lost, the Bible says that Satan **"leads the whole world astray"** (Revelation 12:9). And every soul that remains astray and alienated from God is condemned with the devil. Jesus came to lead men back to God and redeem them from the condemnation of their sins. He came to bring light for his lost sheep. And all who follow him will indeed be reconciled to God and be saved.

The parable of the ten bondmen

- **And as they heard these things, he spoke, adding on a parable because he was near Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.**
- **And having called ten of his bondmen, he gave them ten minas and said to them, Do business until I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent an embassy behind him, saying, We do not want this man to reign over us (Luke 19:11-14).**

When Jesus first began to preach he proclaimed that the kingdom of God (or the heavens) was near. Notice, however, the above passage indicates the kingdom of God was not yet; it would not appear immediately. It did not appear until after his ascension into heaven. When Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was near, the people thought he was going to establish a worldly kingdom. The above parable is one of several he gave to gradually teach them what the kingdom was really like.

The far country in that parable symbolizes heaven, which Jesus received when he ascended back after his crucifixion. The ten bondmen symbolize his disciples, who are all expected to “do business” until he returns at the end of the world. That nobleman gave each of those bondmen ten minas. A mina was worth about a hundred shekels, and a shekel was worth about a day’s labor. Hence, he gave them a substantial amount of money to “do business” with.

Our business is to bear fruit for righteousness. That includes the work of teaching the good news of Christ and bringing new souls into his kingdom. And God has given us the Bible to use in that work. The Bible, which is the word of God, is the greatest resource anyone can use to promote God, his truth, and his righteousness. It is worth more than any amount of money.

In the parable, the citizens who hated him symbolize the unrepentant sinners of the world, who do indeed hate him and do not want him to reign over them. But there is nobody else that I want to reign over me. And every faithful Christian feels the same way.

Rewarding faithful bondmen

- **And it came to pass for him to return, having taken the kingdom. And he said for these bondmen to be called to him, to whom he gave the silver, so that he might know what any man gained by trading.**
- **And the first came, saying, Lord, thy mina gained ten minas. And he said to him, Well, thou good bondman. Because thou became faithful in the least, be thou having authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy mina gained five minas. And he also said to him, And thou become over five cities (Luke 19:15-19).**

This part of the parable symbolizes the day of judgment, when Jesus will be sitting in his throne at the right hand of God. And we will all be called into account for how we served him in this life. Each one of us will be judged by our works (see Revelation 20:12). And those who are judged faithful will be given authority with him. For he said, **“He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne”** (Revelation 3:21). That parable also provides more evidence that there will be degrees of reward in heaven.

The lazy bondman

- **And another came, saying, Lord, behold thy mina, which I had put away in a napkin. For I was afraid of thee because thou are an austere man. Thou take up what thou did not lay down, and reap what thou did not sow.**
- **He says to him, Out of thy mouth I will judge thee, thou evil bondman. Thou had known that I am an austere man taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow. Then why did thou not give my silver into a bank, and having come I would have collected it with interest? (Luke 19:20-23).**

This parable about the ten minas is very similar to the one about the talents that was recorded in Matthew’s biography of Jesus. (See Matthew 25:14-30 for my comments about that parable.) The one talent man buried his talent and did not use it. The man in this parable with the one mina put it away in a napkin and did not use it. Both of those lazy men in those parables criticized their lords, saying they reaped where they did not sow, and gathered where they did not scatter (or lay down).

The man who was only given one mina accused his lord of being an austere man, taking what he did not work for. He apparently resented having to labor to give his lord whatever he might gain. And, apparently fearing that he might lose what he was given, he put away the mina that was given him. Hence, he justified himself by returning what his lord gave him.

His lord called him an evil bondman. And he reminded him of what that bondman himself knew: namely, that his lord took what he did not work for; that he expected to be given what the bondman worked for. But that is true of all employers; they expect to gain profits from the labor of their employees. In the world that is the only way they can stay in business. It is from those profits that they are able to pay their employees.

Both of their lords rejected that excuse, and they told those men they should have at least taken what they had been given (the talent and the mina) to the bankers so that they could have gained interest. Our Lord will accept no excuses for not striving to bear fruit for him, regardless of how little we may have.

Notice how Jesus approved earning interest on our bank deposits. The law of Moses that was against charging interest was only for the sons of Israel: **“Thou shall not lend upon interest to thy brother: interest of money, interest of food, interest of anything that is lent upon interest. To a foreigner thou may lend upon interest, but to thy brother thou shall not lend upon interest, that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all that**

thou put thy hand to, in the land where thou go in to possess it" (Deuteronomy 23:19-20). The Israelites were to be like a brotherhood, and loans were given to help those in need. Therefore interest charges to them were not allowed.

Losing what was given but not used

- **And he said to those who stood by, Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has the ten minas. And they said to him, Lord, he has ten minas. For I say to you, that to every man who has, will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him** (Luke 19:24-26).

The lord took the one mina from the lazy man and gave it to the man with the most minas. And he justified his decision with a lesson about who is given things, and who has them taken away: **"For to every man who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him."**

That principle is true in many ways. For example, it is commonly known that the more money a man has the more he can gain. Also the less he has the less he can gain, which explains this proverb: **"The destruction of the poor is their poverty"** (Proverbs 10:15). Poverty keeps a man down even when he wants to work hard. For example, in America few men can even find employment if they do not own a car. That is an important reason why we should help the worthy poor.

Another example of the principle Jesus gave is the fact that the more a man learns the more he can learn. That is a major reason why the well educated learn so much better than those not well educated. And there are many other ways proving that principle.

Killing his enemies

- **Nevertheless those enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring here, and kill them before me** (Luke 19:27).

This part of the parable of the minas is rarely mentioned by this permissive generation of Americans. It clearly teaches that God is going to kill unrepentant sinners. He will kill (in the sense of a living death) their eternal spirits in the unquenchable fires of hell, which the book of Revelation calls the second death: **"This is the second death, the lake of fire"** (Revelation 20:14). It is called death, but they will still exist, because that death is a living death. For they will be completely conscious of their suffering, which they deserve.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey

- **And having spoke these things, he went ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass when he came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying, Go ye into the opposite village, in which, having entered, ye will find a colt tied, on which no man ever sat. Having untied, bring it. And if any man asks you, Why do ye untie it? Thus ye will say to him, The Lord has need of it.**

- **And having departed, those who were sent found just as he said to them. And as they were untying the colt, the masters of it said to them, Why do ye untie the colt? And they said, The Lord has need of it. And they brought it to Jesus. And having cast their garments upon the colt, they mounted Jesus (Luke 19:28-35).**

Kings of the world make their grand entrances sitting loftily on noble steeds, not on lowly donkeys, which are used by the common people. Jesus is the King of kings, yet he chose to make his grand entrance into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Remember, Jesus said to the people about himself: **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). Jesus and God his Father have the ultimate power over all things. Yet Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. And if we want to be faithful disciples of him, then we too must be meek and lowly in heart. And we must show it in our lives.

However, being meek and lowly does not mean we should shirk from our battle against sin and wickedness. Remember what David said about Jehovah: **“With the merciful thou will show thyself merciful. With the perfect man thou will show thyself perfect. With the pure thou will show thyself pure. And with the perverse thou will show thyself contrary. And the afflicted people thou will save, but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou may bring them down”** (Second Samuel 22:26-28).

Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem

- **And as he went, they spread their garments on the road. And as he was now coming near, at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began rejoicing to praise God in a great voice about all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:36-38).**

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times after he began his ministry. But this was his grand entrance as the son of David, the Messiah. And the multitudes honored him that way, shouting out in praise to him. They even spread things on the road, including their own garments, as a sign of honor to him, similar to what we do in modern times with what we call the red carpet treatment.

Notice how they blessed Jesus as **“the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”** The record by Matthew says they also called him the son of David. By calling him the King who comes in the name of the Lord, and the son of David, they were announcing that he was the Christ.

Pharisees complain

- **And some of the Pharisees from the multitude said to him, Teacher, rebuke thy disciples. And having answered, he said to them, I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out (Luke 19:39-40).**

Most of the people who accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem believed in him. However, there were some Pharisees there also. And they complained about how the people were praising him. They did not believe he was the Christ. Therefore, they resented the people praising him that way, and they demanded that Jesus, whom they called Teacher, rebuke his disciples. However, Jesus gave a mild rebuke to those Pharisees when he said the very stones would cry out if the people did not. Jesus never denied being the Christ, although he did not proclaim it widely.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem

- **And when he came near, having seen the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou knew, even thou, indeed even in this thy day, the things for thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes.**
- **Because the days will come upon thee, and thine enemies will build a barricade around thee, and will surround thee, and enclose thee on every side. And they will raze thee and thy children within thee. And they will not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou knew not the time of thy visitation (Luke 19:41-44).**

When that passage says that Jesus wept over Jerusalem, it no doubt means he quietly shed tears over it. He wept over it because he foresaw its terrible destruction. It was going to be destroyed because the population as a whole had rejected the Son of God. Jehovah had warned the Israelites from the beginning that they would be destroyed if they forsook him.

See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 for the detailed description of the blessings and curses that God gave to the people in the wilderness of Sinai. Those blessings and curses depended upon their obedience or disobedience to him. And the ultimate curse was to utterly destroy their nation, and scatter the remnant of the people abroad among other nations, where the Gentiles would hold them in contempt and persecute them.

Jesus only mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem, which would be the beginning of their punishment for not knowing the time of their visitation. That visitation was the coming of the only begotten Son of God, who was sent from heaven itself to bring salvation to them. But alas, they blindly rejected that salvation. Hence, Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed, both its population and its buildings. And it happened forty years after Jesus began his ministry.

Cleansing the temple of robbers

- **And having entered into the temple, he began to cast out those selling and buying in it, saying to them, It is written, My house is a house of prayer, but ye made it a den of robbers (Luke 19:45-46).**

Jesus was physically aggressive to those “robbers” because they were in the temple of God. They obviously had permission to be there from the rulers of the Jews, but they were charging exorbitant prices, making them robbers. They could make excessive charges

because many Jews who lived in foreign countries needed to purchase things there for their sacrifices.

Here is the law about using money that way: **“Thou shall surely tithe all the increase of thy seed; that which comes forth from the field year by year. And thou shall eat before Jehovah thy God, in the place which he shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, the tithe of thy grain, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herd and of thy flock, that thou may learn to fear Jehovah thy God always.**

“And if the way is too long for thee, so that thou are not able to carry it, because the place is too far from thee, which Jehovah thy God shall choose to set his name there when Jehovah thy God shall bless thee, then thou shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in thy hand, and shall go to the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose.

“And thou shall bestow the money for whatever thy soul desires, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever thy soul asks of thee. And thou shall eat there before Jehovah thy God, and thou shall rejoice, thou and thy household. And the Levite who is within thy gates, thou shall not forsake him, for he has no portion nor inheritance with thee” (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

The biography of Jesus by John tells of an earlier time when Jesus had cast out those merchants (see John 2:14-16). Since both of them occurred at the time of the Passover feast, perhaps those merchants were only there during that annual celebration. Jesus must have cast them out each time he went, but they probably returned after he departed Jerusalem. However, there are other theories attempting to explain those two reports.

Here is the passage from Isaiah about the temple being a house of prayer: **“Also the foreigners who join themselves to Jehovah, to minister to him, and to love the name of Jehovah, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant, even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).**

The foremost men sought to destroy him

- **And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scholars sought to destroy him, even the foremost men of the people. And they did not find what they might do, for the people all hung upon him, listening (Luke 19:47-48).**

Jesus angered the rulers of the Jews many times. He did not obey many of their traditions, but exposed them for undermining true obedience to the law. He exposed their hypocrisy, and rebuked them severely because of it. He spoke many parables against them. He violated their extreme legalism of the law, especially about observing the sabbath. And he interfered with their profitable commerce by casting out the merchants from the temple.

They were also cowards, because they feared the people, who were awed by his doctrine. Consequently, they would not attempt to physically attack him in public, even though they

were the rulers of the people. That is why Judas betrayed Jesus in the middle of the night outside the city.

When the passage says the people all hung upon him listening, that does not refer to the entire population, but only to his disciples and to those in the temple, which were the most religious minded of the people.

Answering a question with a question

- **And it came to pass on one of those days, as he was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the good news, the chief priests and the scholars with the elders stood near. And they spoke, saying to him, Tell us, by what authority are thou doing these things? Or who is he who gave thee this authority?**
- **And having answered, he said to them, I also will ask you one word, and ye tell me. The immersion of John, was it from heaven or from men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we should say, From heaven, he will say, Why did ye not believe him? But if we say, From men, all the people will stone us, for they are convinced John is a prophet. And they replied not to know from where. And Jesus said to them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things (Luke 20:1-8).**

The chief priests and the elders were no doubt angry that Jesus had cast out the merchants from the temple. I suspect they were receiving payments from the merchants for that privilege. Moreover, Jesus challenged their authority to allow those merchants to be there by casting them out.

When the chief priests, the scholars, and the elders demanded to know by what authority Jesus did those things, and who gave it to him, he asked them a question. After hearing the question, they knew that whatever answer they gave would have condemned them. Therefore, they refused to answer. That is a good lesson for us. We are not obligated to answer every question someone asks of us, especially if they will not answer our questions. That was not the only time Jesus would not give to those who asked him. We have the freedom to use our discretion about how we respond to people, especially when they challenge us.

The parable of the leased vineyard

- **And he began to speak this parable to the people. A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to farmers, and went abroad for a considerable time. And at the season he sent a bondman to the farmers, so that they would give him from the fruit of the vineyard. But having beaten him, the farmers sent him away empty.**
- **And he proceeded to send another bondman. And they, having beaten and shamefully treated, sent him also away empty. And he proceeded to send a third. And they also having wounded this man, cast him out.**

- **And the lord of the vineyard said, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will be made ashamed after seeing this man. But when the farmers saw him, they deliberated among themselves, saying, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, so that the inheritance may become ours. And having cast him outside of the vineyard, they killed him (Luke 20:9-15).**

In that parable the house-ruler symbolizes God; the vineyard symbolizes the land of Israel; the farmers symbolize the Israelites; the fruits symbolize their productive obedience to him; and the son of the house-ruler is Jesus Christ. Through that parable Jesus prophesied how they would reject and kill him because they wanted to live as they pleased and not how God wanted them to live.

In another sense however, that parable could be generalized to say something about the devil and his disciples. Perhaps what they want is to possess the world as their own. And destroying the Son of God would mean they could keep it. For who else could God give the world to if his Son failed? Therefore, the devil and his disciples did everything they could to cause Jesus to sin so that the kingdom of God in the world would fail. Which would mean the kingdom of the devil would prevail.

The devil and his disciples want us to fail (spiritually) because Jesus lives in us. For Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him”** (Romans 8:9). Indeed, Paul said to the Ephesians, **“... we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

Justice in the end

- **What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. And having heard it, they said, May it not happen! (Luke 20:15-16).**

The record of that response in Mark reads this way: **“What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the farmers, and will give the vineyard to others”** (Mark 12:9-11). And in Luke it reads this way: **“What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. And having heard it, they said, May it not happen!”** (Luke 20:15-16). Both Mark and Luke say that Jesus answered his own question but Matthew gives the answer of the rulers, both of which answers condemned the farmers. The record in Luke also says that the rulers opposed Jesus’ answer.

I offer the following explanation of those differences. Putting the two passages together, the story probably went something like this:

What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? They say to him, Evil men, he will miserably destroy them, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus agreed, and said to them, He will come and destroy these farmers, and will give the vineyard to others. But the Jews, having heard it and realizing it applied to them, they said, May it not happen!

It was only after the Jews realized the parable was against them that they rejected the judgment of destruction.

Luke merely abbreviated the exchange to present only how the lesson applied to those Jewish rulers and how they refused it. Consequently, he omitted what the rulers said about the farmers in the parable. He omitted it because it was not needed. Their response merely showed how they agreed with the justice of condemning those farmers before they realized the parable applied to them.

Remember, the Bible is a highly concise and condensed book. Therefore, be not concerned if details are omitted here and there in various passages. God has provided in his holy book what is sufficient for us, sufficient to give us the knowledge of him and his will for us that we need.

The stone that was rejected

- **But having looked upon them, he said, What then is this that is written, The stone that those who build rejected, this became the head of the corner?** (Luke 20:17).

Those rulers did not realize the father and the son in that parable referred to God and Christ. And so Jesus tried to make it clear by rebuking them, asking if they never read the scripture about the stone rejected by those who build. That stone symbolizes Jesus Christ, and those who build symbolize the rulers of the Jews.

By means of the parable Jesus was warning those corrupt rulers that God will take vengeance against them and will find others who will serve him in righteousness. And after the parable he reminded them of the psalm about how the stone that was rejected became the headstone: **“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner”** (Psalm 118:22).

The stone and falling

- **Every man who falls on that stone will be broken, but on whomever it may fall, it will grind him to dust** (Luke 20:18).

In that passage Jesus applied the parable about the farmers directly to them. The Jews were the chosen people of God, but he was going to give his kingdom of the heavens to another nation that would serve him in righteousness. And that nation is the spiritual nation called the kingdom of God, which on the earth is the church. Jesus is the headstone of that nation, and he is eventually going to totally crush all of his enemies.

The Old Testament tells how the prophet Daniel in Babylon revealed to king Nebuchadnezzar the mysterious dream the king had. His dream foretold how a mighty kingdom would break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms and would stand forever. Here is that story:

“Daniel answered before the king, and said, The secret which the king has demanded, neither wise men, enchanters, magicians, nor soothsayers, can show to

the king, but there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets. And he has made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.

“Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these: As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter. And he who reveals secrets has made known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living man, but to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that thou may know the thoughts of thy heart.

“Thou, O king, saw, and, behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty, and whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee, and the appearance of it was fearful. As for this image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron, and part of clay.

“Thou looked until a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, was broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

“This is the dream, and we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. Thou, O king, are a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory. And wherever the sons of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, he has given into thy hand, and has made thee to rule over them all. Thou are the head of gold.

“And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things. And as iron that crushes all these, it shall break in pieces and crush. And whereas thou saw the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom.

“But there shall be of the strength of the iron in it, inasmuch as thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cling one to another, even as iron does not mix with clay.

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty of it be left to another people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as thou saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (Daniel 2:27-45).

The first kingdom Daniel mentioned was the Babylonian empire; the second was the Persian empire; the third was the Macedonian (Greek) empire of Alexander; and the fourth was the Roman empire. The last kingdom is the kingdom of God, the church. Other king-

doms rise and fall, but at the end of the world they will all be broken and consumed, ground into dust by the power of the Son of God. But the kingdom of God will never be destroyed; it will stand forever. And we will stand with it, if we remain faithful until the end.

Wanting to throw hands on him

- **And the chief priests and the scholars sought to throw hands on him in the same hour. And they were afraid, for they knew that he spoke this parable against them** (Luke 20:19).

The chief priests and the scholars wanted to arrest Jesus immediately, but they were afraid, afraid of the multitudes who supported him. They wanted to arrest him immediately because they knew he spoke the parable against them. That parable exposed them as evil men who deserved being rejected by God. However, instead of repenting, they hated Jesus and wanted to destroy him.

Trying to trap Jesus in his talk

- **And having watched him, they sent forth insidious men pretending themselves to be righteous, so that they might take hold of his word, in order to deliver him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor.**
- **And they questioned him, saying, Teacher, we know that thou speak and teach rightly, and thou do not accept a personage, but teach the way of God in truth, Is it permitted for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?**
- **But having perceived their craftiness, he said to them, Why do ye try me? Display to me a denarius. Whose image and inscription has it? And having answered, they said, Caesar's. And he said to them, Then render the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God. And they were unable to lay hold of his word before the people. And having marveled at his answer, they were silent** (Luke 20:20-26).

That event is a classic example of how the devil and his disciples strive to cause righteous men to say something they can use against them. First they flattered him, about which Solomon said, **“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps”** (Proverbs 29:5).

Then they asked him a question they thought would trap him. For if he said to pay the tribute money, that would have indicated he supported the Roman occupation of Israel and the requirement to pay them tribute, which was hated by the people. And if he said not to pay it, then he could be charged with teaching rebellion against the Romans. Indeed, Luke says they questioned him that way **“in order to deliver him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor.”** That governor was the representative of Rome.

Jesus easily defeated their crafty design against him, and he used the occasion to teach a lesson about giving the things of God to God. And no doubt the common people, even

though they hated the tribute, rejoiced when they saw the skillful way he turned that crafty question against those hypocrites who asked it. The record says that even those enemies marveled at his answer. Being so awed at his answer they had nothing more they could say, and so they departed.

Sadducees also ask him a question

- **And some of the Sadducees having approached, those who say there is no resurrection, they questioned him, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote to us, if any brother dies, having a wife, and this man dies childless, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed to his brother.**
- **There were therefore seven brothers. And the first having taken a wife, died childless. And the second took the woman, and this man died childless. And the third likewise took her, and likewise also the seven; they left behind no children, and died. And last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them does she become? For the seven had her as wife (Luke 20:27-33).**

Not much is known about the Sadducees, except they were judged with the Pharisees as men deserving of rebuke. The Sadducees seem to have been a kind of minority political sect of a higher class than the Pharisees. For the book of Acts says the high priest was of the sect of the Sadducees (see Acts 5:17). Also the Bible mentions the Pharisees seven times more often than the Sadducees. The Sadducees apparently believed in God, but not the personal one of the Bible record. The book of acts says about them, “... Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all” (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees also came to Jesus with what they thought was a question he could not answer. Here is the law about propagating a brother's name: **“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies, and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be, that the firstborn who she bears shall succeed in the name of his brother who is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel”** (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

However, that practice was older than the law of Moses. The first reference in the Bible to that practice was with one of the sons of Judah. Judah was one of the twelve sons of Israel, and he lived centuries before Moses. Here is what the Bible says about it: **“And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah killed him. And Judah said to Onan, Go in to thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to thy brother”** (Genesis 38:6-8).

No marriage in heaven

- **And having answered, Jesus said to them, The sons of this age marry, and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that**

age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. For neither can they die any more, for they are like the agents, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

- **But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the Bush when he calls the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him (Luke 20:27-38).**

Jesus explained the difference of our existence in heaven compared with how it is on the earth. There is no feminine gender in heaven, nor will there ever be. The feminine gender is for this world only. Remember, every agent of God sent from heaven to the earth was a man. There are no female “angels.” They are a myth created and perpetrated by artists.

Then he quoted a scripture that implied an afterlife as evidence of the resurrection of the dead. That passage was about the first time Jehovah appeared to Moses: **“And the agent of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.**

“And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Do not draw near here. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place on which thou stand is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:2-6).

The fact that Jesus used the scriptures to make inferences justifies our using the scriptures in logical ways to make conclusions that are not specifically stated, such as there being no female form in heaven. Of course, great caution should always be used when interpreting the Bible that way, because it is subject to misuse. Nevertheless, it can be a powerful and very useful way to further our knowledge and understanding.

It should be noted that the Old Testament has no direct teachings about the resurrection of the dead. That is why it was a controversial idea among the Jews. I believe God reserved that wonderful knowledge for the time of Christ so that it could be a part of his good news of salvation.

Notice how Jesus said, **“... those who are considered worthy to attain to that age, and the resurrection from the dead ... are like the agents, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”** Those who remain faithful to Christ, will be like the agents in heaven. However, they will not be agents there; they will be sons of God, having been resurrected from life in this world. For only souls who live faithfully to God in this world will become sons of God with Jesus in heaven.

They no longer questioned Jesus

- **And some of the scholars having answered, they said, Teacher, thou said well. For they no longer dared to question him anything (Luke 20:39-40).**

The Pharisees disputed with the Sadducees about the existence of the afterlife. And Jesus proved the Sadducees were wrong about denying its existence. That may be why some of the scholars complimented Jesus on his answer. Nevertheless, whenever Jesus' opponents challenged him with questions he always defeated them. Hence, they quit trying.

Jesus asks them a question

- **And he said to them, How do they say the Christ is David's son? Even David himself says in the book of Psalms, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I will place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet. David therefore calls him Lord, and how is he his son? (Luke 20:41-44).**

Before David sinned against Uriah, God had promised David to make of him a never ending dynasty. Therefore, the Jews said the Christ (the Messiah, the anointed one) would be a son (a descendant) of David. However, Jesus gave them a riddle about it, which they could not answer. The riddle involved this passage from the Psalms: **"Jehovah says to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool"** (Psalm 110:1). How could David call his son "my Lord?" The answer is that the Christ was a son of David in his flesh, but he was his Lord in his spirit.

This perverted generation of Americans would have no problem with a father calling his son "lord." Indeed, it is very common for them to proclaim the children of a family to be wiser and more righteous than their fathers. Nevertheless, in the sight of God a father calling his son "lord" is a great perversion. One of the ten commandment says, **"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee"** (Exodus 20:12). It is perverse to say that fathers and mothers should honor their children, which is what this perverted and adulterous generation of Americans promote. Notice how often they portray a father or mother bowing down or kneeling before their children.

Jesus warns of the ways of the scholars

- **And while all the people were listening, he said to his disciples, Beware of the scholars, who desire to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at the feasts, who devour widows' houses, and in pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation (Luke 20:45-47).**

Most people admire the leading men of the world, and in ancient Israel the scholars were in that class. Remember, literacy was rare in those times. And books were scarce and very expensive, more than the average man could afford even if he could read. The printing press had not yet been invented, which meant books all had to be reproduced completely by hand. Therefore, copying scrolls and books was a major occupation of the scholars. And since they were so exposed to books they became very knowledgeable. Hence, they also served as teachers and sources of knowledge.

Incidentally, there is good evidence that Christians invented the book form of writing. Before that invention lengthy text was written on scrolls that used either papyrus or parchment, both of which were expensive to make.

Those ancient scholars were proud men who strove to glorify themselves. Moreover, they were vicious hypocrites who made long prayers in pretense, but they devoured widow's houses. Wicked men can more easily devour the houses of poor people because the poor are more vulnerable. And there are many ways men can do such evil things legally. But notice how Jesus said they would receive greater condemnation. He was referring to the great day of judgment after the world ends. And what he said is more evidence there will be degrees of reward and punishment for the afterlife.

The relativity of giving

- **And having looked up, he saw the rich casting their gifts into the treasury. And he also saw a certain poor widow there casting in two mites. And he said, Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than they all. For all these cast into the offerings of God from their abundance, but this woman from her poverty cast in all the living that she had (Luke 21:1-4).**

Jesus makes clear with this example that God is not impressed by the actual amount of our charity. It is how much we give relative to what we have that is important. In the sight of God a rich man who gives ten thousand dollars has not given as much as a poor man who gives a hundred dollars. It is how much of a sacrifice we are making to do good that is significant in the sight of God.

That poor widow probably did not realize how her sacrifice would honor her, because what she gave was so little. Yet Jesus was so impressed by what she did that he told his disciples about her. And now the whole world can learn about what she did, because the story of her sacrifice is included in the Bible. She was not the only woman that Jesus praised because of a sacrifice made to do a good work. Think not that your sacrifices are unnoticed by God, even though they may be small in the eyes of the world.

Prophecy of the destruction of the temple

- **And as some spoke about the temple, that it was adorned with fine stones and gifts, he said, These things that ye see, the days will come during which there will not be left a stone upon a stone that will not be thrown down (Luke 21:5-6).**

Jesus was never impressed by the things of the world, including that magnificent temple. Therefore, when some spoke of the glories of the temple, he used the occasion to tell them the days were coming during which **“there will not be left a stone upon a stone that will not be thrown down.”** The complete destruction of the temple occurred forty years after Jesus began his ministry, and it has never been rebuilt. Indeed, it never will be.

Wanting to know when

- **And they questioned him, saying, Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what is the sign when these things are going to happen?** (Luke 21:7).

When Jesus prophesied to his disciples the complete destruction of the temple, they later questioned him for more details. Mark says Peter and James and John and Andrew were the disciples who questioned him privately about those things (see Mark 13:3).

Jesus did not tell them when those things would happen, but he did tell them what would be the signs. And that is told a little farther in this record of his answer. But first he gave them some warnings about the future.

Be not led astray by false Christs

- **And he said, Watch that ye may not be led astray, for many will come in my name, saying, I am, and, The time has come near. Go ye not therefore after them** (Luke 21:8).

Even in my lifetime I have seen many men who proclaimed they were saviors. And they gathered a large following of people who believed in them. Yet eventually such men always proved to be false, and their followers suffered because of it. I have seen the tragic consequences of that happening with many of them. Yet there are still some who have not yet been exposed. It is a continual overlapping process of such men rising and then falling. While some are falling, others are rising. Beware of them all.

The travails of the world

- **And when ye may hear of wars and tumults, do not be alarmed, for these things must first happen, but the end is not straightaway. Then he said to them, Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And great earthquakes will be in various places, and famines and plagues. And there will be fearful sights and great signs from the sky** (Luke 21:9-11).

After warning about false Christ's, Jesus told them to expect many tribulations in the world before the end happens—wars and tumults, earthquakes, famines, and plagues. Those things happen in every generation, and they will continue till the end of the world.

He also told them there would be fearful sights and great signs from the sky. There were certainly fearful sights and great signs from the sky during World War II. And recently there was a news report of a large meteor that fell over Russia. It produced a great flash of light and exploded with a very loud sound like a bomb. Such things continue to occasionally happen in this world of tribulation.

The lesson for us in what Jesus said in that passage is that we should expect terrible things to happen from time to time in this world, things that are fearful and awesome. But remember what Jesus said about them: **“... do not be alarmed, for these things must first happen, but the end is not straightaway.”**

Defending against accusations

- **But before all these things, they will throw their hands on you, and will persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake But it will go out from you for testimony. Settle therefore in your hearts not to premeditate to make defense. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom that all those who oppose you will not be able to contradict or to resist (Luke 21:12-15).**

Jesus warned that before the end of the world we are all going to suffer persecution, sometimes very severe persecution. The early Christians indeed suffered the things Jesus described. But in many places of the modern world Christians are still suffering severe persecutions. And as America becomes progressively more spiritually decadent we are going to suffer more severe persecution here. Before this sinful generation developed, such persecution in America was rare. It was rare because faith in Christ was so strong by so many. But that faith has now declined greatly.

Jesus encouraged us by saying that our persecution will go out from us for testimony. It will be testimony to the world about how strong our faith in Christ is. And it will be testimony in the great day of judgment as evidence of our worthiness to become sons of God for eternity.

When Jesus told how he would give his disciples a mouth and wisdom to defend against their persecutors, that was certainly fulfilled in the early days of the church. And it may even be true now for those of us who have proven our faithfulness to him. Although such things cannot be confirmed, there have been times when it seemed to me that Jesus somehow helped give me a mouth and wisdom when I was being opposed for remaining faithful to him.

Nevertheless, I would never claim it actually happened to me. And neither can any other man living after the time of the early church make such a claim. For that was a time when men were gifted by the Holy Spirit to testify in special ways before we had the New Testament record of the word of God. We can only think it may have happened when we are successful in opposing those who attempt to contradict or resist our efforts to proclaim the full truth of the good news of Christ. And we should not proclaim such ideas to others. About such opinions, we should hearken to what Paul said: **“The faith thou have, have in relation to thyself before God”** (Romans 14:22).

Ye will be hated by all

- **And ye will be betrayed even by parents, and kinsmen, and friends, and brothers. And some of you they will condemn to death. And ye will be hated by all men because of my name. And, no, not a hair of your head will perish. In your perseverance ye gain your souls (Luke 21:16-19).**

Those words were also recorded in Matthew. But here in the book of Luke, Jesus gave an even more specific warning about how severely some of his disciple would be persecuted. And within most Muslim families such persecution against Christians commonly happens.

Indeed, there have been, and continue to be, news reports about such severe persecution. Severe persecution against Christians is also common in communist countries and in nations with large Hindu populations.

Even when there is no severe persecution authentic Christians are still hated by the world. For most people who claim to believe in Christ are not willing to obey him, and they hate whoever criticizes them because of it.

The expression about not a hair of our head perishing was a common figure of speech during Bible times. And in this case it refers to our eternal salvation. For even when our bodies are beaten and killed, our eternal spirit is protected.

The last sentence in that passage is another promise to encourage our perseverance. We gain our souls by being redeemed from the condemnation caused by our sins, redeemed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When Jerusalem will be destroyed

- **But when ye see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that the desolation of it has come near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those in the midst of it depart out, and let not those in the rural areas enter into it. Because these are days of vengeance to fulfill all things that are written.**
- **But woe to those who have in the womb, and to those who suckle in those days. For there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people** (Luke 21:20-23).

Jesus here prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The armies that would surround Jerusalem were from the Romans. Jesus warned his disciples that as soon as they saw that happening to make great haste and immediately flee from Jerusalem and Judea to escape the great tribulations the Roman army would bring there.

When those things happened the Roman army was apparently so full of fury and had so much power, that they wanted nothing but death and a completely scorched earth for the land of Israel. The Jews had always been a thorn in the side of the Romans because the Jews had such a fierce attitude of superiority, contempt for Gentiles, and rebellious independence.

Moreover, the fanatical Jews kept everyone in the city and would not allow any to escape. They kept everyone there to help fight the Roman army. That was why Jesus' disciples needed to escape out of the city as quickly as possible. For the people of the city suffered enormously, first by famine caused by the siege, and then by the vicious Roman army when they conquered it.

Jesus called that time, days of vengeance to fulfill all things that are written. The scriptures tell how God would take his vengeance upon the Israelites for their sinfulness. The law of Moses warned of many curses that would befall them if they turned away from Jehovah. And they certainly did when they rejected Jesus the Son of God. You can read those many curses in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

Jerusalem trampled by the Gentiles

- **And they will fall by the jaw of the sword, and will be led away captive into all the nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (Luke 21:24).

Most of the population perished when Jerusalem was destroyed. Only a tiny remnant survived to be scattered among all the nations. The Romans scattered the Jewish people to keep them divided and weak because the Jews were such a troublesome people.

Our generation has seen the end of the times when the Gentiles trampled Jerusalem. For soon after WWII the nation of Israel was reborn and the Jews eventually took possession of the city. The times when the Gentiles trampled Jerusalem lasted eighteen hundred and ninety-seven years, from AD 70 to AD 1967.

Signs of the end

- **And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, roaring of sea and of tossing, fainting of men from fear, and of anticipation of the things coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken** (Luke 21:25-26).

Jesus is here speaking about the end of the world. It will be a time when the whole world will be subjected to great violence, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. The powers of the heavens refer to the mighty astronomical forces of the universe. And that violence will cause distress of nations, fainting of men from fear and of anticipation of the things coming upon the world.

Peter wrote about the violence of the end of the world (which he called the day of the Lord), when he said, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, during which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, being intensely hot, will be disintegrated, and the earth and the works in it will be destroyed by fire”** (Second Peter 3:10).

How to react to the end of the world

- **And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. And when these things begin to happen, stand upright, and lift up your heads, because your redemption approaches** (Luke 21:27-28).

At the end of the world the Son of man (Jesus Christ) will be seen coming in a cloud with power and much glory. Sinners will cower when they see those things happening, but we will stand upright, lifting up our heads, because our redemption approaches. We will be redeemed from the punishment of our sins because we believed and obeyed the Son of God. Moreover, we will be taken to heaven to live there with God as his sons for eternity.

Recognizing the signs

- **And he spoke a parable to them. Behold the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are now sprouting, ye know seeing for yourselves that summer is now near. Even so ye, when ye see these things happening, know ye that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, that this generation will, no, not pass away until all things happen. The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away (Luke 21:29-33).**

After describing what would happen at the end of the world, Jesus then warned his disciples with a parable to look for the signs that were going to come upon that generation; namely, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And he told them that would happen during the time of their generation, which it did. And he reinforced the certainty of his prophecy by saying the world itself would pass away, but not his words.

What he meant by **“when ye see these things happening, know ye that the kingdom of God is near,”** he was telling them that the kingdom of God was also coming soon. And it did come soon after his ascension into heaven. Indeed, it came even sooner than that terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that he prophesied about.

Thus, there were two things they needed to recognize from the signs that were coming soon: the kingdom of God and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Both of those things happened to that generation. And he reinforced the certainty of his warning by saying the world itself would pass away, but not his words. The words of Jesus are still with us, and they will continue even after the world ends. For he said about the day of judgment, **“He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has that which judges him: the word that I spoke, that will judge him in the last day”** (John 12:48).

Always be prepared for the end

- **But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down in debauchery and drunkenness and mundane cares, and that day come upon you sudden. For it will come like a trap upon all those who sit upon the face of all the earth. Watch ye therefore, making supplication at all times, so that ye may be considered worthy to escape all these things going to happen, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:34-36).**

Jesus then warned them about being prepared for the end of the world. And his warning is relevant for every time and place. For every man perishes after living a brief time in this world of tribulation. As James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14). And we rarely know when we are going to perish. In a psychological sense the end of the world for us is when we die. Therefore, we should heed warnings such as the one quoted above about always being prepared.

Jesus told us to make supplication at all times. We should cling to our heavenly Father the way a child clings to its mother. And we should continually pray for his help in making us

worthy to escape eternal punishment, and to stand before our Lord and Savior when we die and this world ends for us.

Lodging on the mount called Olives

- **And during the days he was teaching in the temple, and going forth the nights, he lodged on the mount that is called Olives. And all the people rose early in the morning to him in the temple to hear him (Luke 21:37-38).**

That place is also called the mount of Olives. It is often mentioned in the New Testament. For example, it was where Jesus prophesied to his disciples both about the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world. It was also where he took them after the last supper. The Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed lies at the foot of the mount of Olives.

Judas agrees to betray Jesus

- **Now the feast of unleavened bread was coming near, which is called Passover. And the chief priests and the scholars sought how they might kill him, for they feared the people.**
- **And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And having departed, he conversed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed together to give him silver. And he consented and sought opportunity to betray him to them apart from the multitude (Luke 22:1-6).**

The day of the Passover meal was the first of the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread. The chief priests and the scholars knew that Jesus would be in Jerusalem for that time. He would be there because all the sons of Israel were commanded in the law of Moses to observe that feast. Since Jesus would be there that gave them a better opportunity to find a way to kill him.

When the passage says that Satan entered into Judas, it means the spirit of Satan entered his mind and his heart to influence his thoughts and his actions. Satan can do that with men whose hearts are receptive to him. He tries to do it with us, but we resist him. Judas was “in tune” with the spirit of Satan, which made Judas receptive to him. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

In John’s biography of Jesus he tells how Satan entered into Judas during the Passover supper with Jesus and the other apostles on the night he betrayed Jesus. Apparently Satan does not remain in a man, but his spirit enters into him whenever he wants to arouse him for some evil deed. And perhaps because Jesus continued to show kindness to Judas, Satan may have been concerned that Judas might change his mind. Therefore, he aroused him to go and begin the betrayal.

According to the book of Matthew the chief priests gave Judas silver in advance (see Matthew 26:14-16), which was probably to encourage him not to change his mind about betraying Jesus. Nevertheless, from that time Judas sought how he might betray him conveniently. That means away from the multitudes that supported him.

Preparing for the last supper

- **And the day of unleavened bread came during which it was necessary to kill the Passover. And he sent Peter and John, saying, After departing, prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat. And they said to him, Where do thou want that we should prepare?**
- **And he said to them, Behold, having entered into the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house where he enters. And ye shall say to the house-ruler, The teacher says to thee, Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished. Prepare there. And having gone, they found just as he said to them, and they prepared the Passover (Luke 22:12-13).**

How the house-ruler knew to furnish that large upper room for Jesus and his apostles is not told. Perhaps he received a vision of an agent from heaven the way Joseph had been instructed about Mary.

The Passover feast required using unleavened bread and an unblemished male lamb for the feast. Remember, the Passover feast was to celebrate the salvation of their firstborn sons when God slew all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians the night before the sons of Israel were given their freedom and departed from Egypt (see Exodus 12:1-14). The Israelites departed Egypt the very next morning after the Passover. Indeed, the Egyptians urged them to leave quickly because they were afraid they were all going to die.

Originally the Passover feast was separate from the feast of unleavened bread. However, it was not long before they joined the two together, and that had Moses' approval. I discuss those things much more in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Jesus' desire for the last supper

- **And when the hour came, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said to them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before my suffering. For I say to you, that I will eat of it no more, no, not till when it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.**
- **And having taken a cup, having expressed thanks, he said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I say to you, that I will, no, not drink from the fruit of the grapevine till when the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:14-18).**

This was the last time Jesus would be able to enjoy the company of his apostles before his great ordeal. And he had looked forward to having that occasion (with desire he desired). He said he would not eat and drink with them again until the kingdom of God came. That meant after he had been crucified and raised the third day, although his apostles probably did not understand. His sinless lifelong obedience to the Father would make him alone

qualified to have the kingdom of God. Therefore, the kingdom of God was given to Jesus then, which was after his resurrection.

The Bible shows that Jesus always expressed thanks to God whenever he partook of a meal. And although we are not commanded to do the same, it is still a good thing whenever we can. It is like having a weekly day of rest and a weekly time of assembly together. We are not commanded, but it is still a good thing whenever we can. We as his disciples live under the law of liberty, and are not bound to a legal system of statutes and ordinances from God. Although we are certainly under obligation to human law, unless it violates our obedience to God.

Instituting the Lord's supper

- **And after taking bread, having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and gave to them, saying, This is my body that is given for you. Do ye this in my memory. Likewise also the cup after dining, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood being shed for you (Luke 22:19-20).**

Those things happened during the last supper with his apostles. And it describes how Jesus established that simple ceremony as a memorial of him and his great sacrifice for our salvation. The biographies by Matthew and Mark also describe how Jesus instituted that ceremony. Only John's biography of him omits it.

The apostle Paul also wrote about when Jesus established that simple ceremony. For he said, **"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and said, Take ye, eat, this is my body broken for you. This do ye in my memory.**

"Likewise also the cup after the supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as ye drink it, in my memory. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (First Corinthians 11:23-26). Notice how Paul also quoted Jesus saying they were to do it in his memory.

All four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, reported how Jesus said the cup of it was his blood of the new covenant. God made several covenants with men in the past. His covenant with the sons of Israel involving the law of Moses is traditionally called the old covenant. The good news of Christ is the new covenant, which says that God will forgive our sins and adopt us to be his sons for eternity in heaven, if we will believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

And that good news is the last covenant God made with man, because it is an eternal covenant. As the author of Hebrews said, **"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood of an eternal covenant—our Lord Jesus—may he make you fully qualified in every good work in order to do his will, doing in you what is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly"** (Hebrews 13:20-21).

It is also a covenant in blood, the blood of the sinless Son of God. The fruit of the grapevine that we drink during the Lord's supper symbolizes his blood. Both the bread and the

fruit of the grapevine symbolize his great sacrifice for us, the sacrifice of his very life upon the cruel cross. And we partake of them to remember that sacrifice.

The Roman Catholics teach this fantastic idea that the bread and the fruit of the grapevine of that ceremony literally become his body and his blood. They call it transubstantiation. That idea is incredibly ridiculous, but they teach it anyway. It is amazing what foolishness many people will believe.

Jesus did not command when or how often to observe that ceremony. He simply said that as often as we did it we proclaimed his death, meaning the sacrifice of his life for us. Paul went on to say much more about that ceremony. He wrote to those brothers in Corinth in an attempt to correct how they had misapplied and abused it.

Yet there is still much controversy about performing that ceremony. Men dispute about when and how often to partake of it; they dispute about whether there should only be one cup and one loaf; they dispute about whether to use wine or just grape juice because the Bible does not say specifically whether the fruit of the grapevine was fermented or not. Nevertheless, that drink was their most common beverage, and is colored red like blood.

Men also dispute about whether they should only use unleavened bread, which is what they used at the last supper. The last supper was held in obedience to the command for the annual Passover feast. And only unleavened bread was allowed for that feast.

Jesus never gave detailed instructions about that simple ceremony, because his good news is a law of liberty. As James said, **“So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty”** (James 2:12). Therefore, it is a mistake to dispute about such things. Paul wrote much to discourage Christians from disputing about matters of opinion (see Romans 14). What is important is that it is done frequently enough to keep his great sacrifice in our memory, and that it should be done with dignity and solemnity. All that is required is bread and fruit of the grapevine. All else is under the law of liberty.

Jesus says one of them would betray him

- **Nevertheless behold, the hand of the man who betrays me is with me on the table. And the Son of man indeed goes according to that which has been determined, but woe to that man through whom he is betrayed! And they began to question among themselves who then of them would be going do this thing** (Luke 22:21-23).

Several times Jesus told his apostles that he would be betrayed. This was the first time he said one of them would be the betrayer. Since each of them asked him if he would be the one, it is obvious the others could not believe that one of them would deliberately betray him. They no doubt thought the betrayal would be accidental.

Jesus said he was going according to that which had been determined, which refers to his trial and crucifixion. Nevertheless, he still uttered a curse against his betrayer, saying, **“... woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!”** Remember, a woe is a curse. Yet Judas was not deterred from betraying him. Judas may not have taken the curse seriously, because he had no faith in him, no more than the scholars and Pharisees that Jesus cursed.

Both Matthew and Mark report Jesus telling his apostles, before he instituted the Lord's supper, that one of them would betray him. However, Luke tells how Jesus told his apostles, after he instituted the Lord's supper, that one of them would betray him. That is just another example of how the descriptions of events in the Bible are not always reported in the same sequence by different authors.

Modern writing expects events to always be reported in their chronological order, unless otherwise specified. But during Bible times it was not considered always necessary. Let not scoffers use such things to challenge your faith. Their ignorance condemns them.

Who ranks higher

- **And also a dispute develop among them, which of them is considered to be greater. And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles have dominion over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called Benefactors.**
- **But ye are not this way. Rather, the greater among you, shall become as the newer, and he who leads, as he who serves. For who ranks higher, he who sits dining, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits dining? But I am in the midst of you as he who serves (Luke 22:24-27).**

This is another passage in Luke that does not seem to fit with the sequence of events described before and after it. It seems to be more of an aside. The first words are very similar to those given much earlier: **"But a thought entered among them, which of them may be greater"** (Luke 9:46). Remember, Luke seems to have made such insertions with several passages found in other places in this book.

Luke also adds to those words the example Jesus gave about different ranks at a meal. For although he who sits dining ranks higher than he who serves, Jesus was in the midst of them as he who serves. Thus, for the disciples of Christ, he who serves ranks higher than he who is served.

Remember, Jesus had told them how they would be in contrast to the Gentiles: **"Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman"** (Matthew 24:26-27).

Promising them thrones

- **But ye are those who have continued with me in my trials. And I appoint to you, just as my Father appointed to me a kingdom, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30).**

Notice how Jesus referred to his ministry as his trials. That means throughout his ministry he was subjected to many trials and tribulations, which were testing his soul. His three temptations in the wilderness were just the beginning of his trials during his ministry. The chief priests, the scholars, and the Pharisees were major sources of those trials. The time

of his betrayal and crucifixion was his greatest trial. And it culminated his life of perfect obedience to the Father, which earned from him the right to redeem our souls and enable us to become sons of God for eternity.

And we too will be subject to trials in this life to prove out worthiness for that redemption. For James said, **“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when ye encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have a perfect work, so that ye may be perfect and complete, falling short in nothing”** (James 1:2-4).

What Jesus said to them were very encouraging words, because they were soon going to experience a great trial, a great test of their faith in him. And the more faith they had in him the more comforting and encouraging those words would be.

And in the same way, the more faith we have in our Lord Jesus Christ the more comforting and encouraging those words will be to us, because they apply to all who trust and obey him. We will all eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, and we will sit on thrones judging not only the twelve tribes of Israel, but all the world; even heavenly agents, because Paul said to the church as Corinth, **“Or know ye not that the sanctified will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy of very small legal disputes? Know ye not that we will judge agents? Then why not mundane things?”** (First Corinthians 6:2-3).

Satan demands them

- **And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you to sift you as wheat, but I prayed for thee, so that thy faith may not fail. And thou, when thou have returned, strengthen thy brothers** (Luke 22:31-32).

When Jesus said that to Peter, notice how he said that Satan demanded to have *you* (plural). Then he said that he prayed for *thee* (singular). He prayed for Peter so that he could strengthen his brothers, his fellow Christians. What Satan demanded to sift as wheat was not just Peter, but all of them. Indeed, he wants to sift all of us as wheat, which means to own us and manipulate us completely, the way a movie director controls the actors during the production of a film.

Speaking about those who oppose us, Paul said, **“Perhaps God may grant them repentance for recognition of the truth, and they may sober up out of the snare of the devil, having been captured by him for his will”** (Second Timothy 2:25-26). Sinners have been captured by the devil to do his will; sifting them as wheat.

Jesus prayed for Peter so that he could help us avoid being captured by the devil, to be sifted as wheat and do his will. After Jesus was resurrected he appeared to Peter and said to him, **“Feed my lambs,”** and **“Feed my sheep”** (John 21:15-17). Peter was very important in the establishment and growth of the church of Christ. And he had been given the keys of the kingdom, which he used to open its gates so that we could become members of it.

Peter was not an official or an anointed leader. He was not a high ranking officer in the church. He was an apostle of Christ, just as some other men were. However, he had been

given the keys of the kingdom, and he was a very talented leader of people, and an influential witness for Christ. Therefore, Jesus prayed that his faith not fail, and he would strengthen his brothers, his fellow believers.

Peter will deny Christ

- **And he said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death. And he said, I say to thee, Peter, a cock will, no, not sound today, before thou will thrice deny that thou know me** (Luke 22:33-34).

Peter was so self-confident of his loyalty to Jesus that he could not believe what Jesus said about his faith being threatened. Therefore, Jesus proved it to him by prophesying that Peter would thrice deny he knew him. And he would do it that very day before a cock sounded.

Regarding Peter's denial, according to Matthew, Jesus said, **"Truly I say to thee, that in this night, before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice"** (Matthew 26:34). According to Mark, Jesus said, **"Truly I say to thee, that thou today, in this night, before a cock sounds twice, will deny me thrice."** (Mark 14:30). According to the passage here in Luke, Jesus said, **"I say to thee, Peter, a cock will, no, not sound today, before thou will thrice deny that thou know me"** (Luke 22:34). And according to John, Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I say to thee, A cock will, no, not sound, until thou will deny me thrice"** (John 13:38).

All four biographers report Jesus saying (1) Peter would deny him, (2) he would deny him before a cock sounded, and (3) he would deny him three times that night. However, Mark reported Jesus saying that Peter would deny him thrice before a cock sounded twice. In Mark's testimony he does mention a cock sounding twice. And he told how Peter denied Jesus once before a cock sounded the first time. I explain that difference in my comments about Mark's report of that prophesy.

Prepare before you evangelize

- **And he said to them, When I sent you without bag and pouch and shoes, did ye lack anything? And they said, Nothing. Then he said to them, But now, he who has a bag, let him take it, and likewise a pouch. And he who has no sword, let him sell his cloak and buy.**
- **For I say to you, that this that is written is still necessary to be completed in me, And he was counted with lawless men, for these things about me also have fulfillment. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said to them, It is enough** (Luke 22:35-38).

When Jesus first sent them out to evangelize he told them not to take extra provisions. However, now he told them to prepare properly before they went, even to carry arms (whatever was appropriate). And those instructions apply to all evangelists now.

The prophecy about Jesus being counted with lawless men is from Isaiah 53:12. It is part of a lengthy passage that describes what the Messiah would be like, and how much he would suffer and be rejected. I quote that entire passage below:

“Behold, my servant shall deal wisely. He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him. For that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall understand.

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as him from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him. He has put him to grief.

“When thou shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed. He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied. By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

The passage in Isaiah that says **“they made his grave with the wicked”** is how he was **“reckoned with lawless men.”** Having been crucified with criminals means Jesus was truly reckoned with lawless men. However, the grave of Jesus was not literally with the wicked, because the man in whose sepulcher he was buried was a righteous man, as Luke says farther in this book. They made his grave with the wicked by having him killed with wicked men.

The words “made his grave” are figurative. They are similar to the modern words that say a man dug his own grave, which means he caused his own end. The rulers of the Jews

made his grave with the wicked by having him crucified with lawless men. And by so doing, they dug their own grave by condemning their soul.

Jesus prays for avoidance

- **And having come out, he proceeded according to his habit to the mount of Olives, and his disciples also followed him. And when he came at the place, he said to them, Pray ye not to enter into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw. And he knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou want, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done (Luke 22:39-42).**

Jesus felt a powerful dread of that terrible ordeal because it caused him to suffer more than any other man ever had or ever will. And having to endure that ordeal voluntarily was perhaps the most difficult part. The constant abuse he was given, the great fatigue he had to endure, and the extreme pain of being flogged and being nailed and hung on the cross were all insignificant compared with the requirement that he who is the King of kings, Lord of lords, and the very author of life had to allow himself to be humiliated and killed.

Moreover, the man of perfect justice who never sinned had to allow the injustice against him of being put on public display and executed as a criminal. As the author of Hebrews said, Jesus **“endured a cross, having despised the shame ...”** (Hebrews 12:2), which no doubt included being publicly displayed as completely naked.

No degree of suffering by anybody can come close to being as severe as his was—it was truly unique in its severity. That was why he was in such agony before it happened. That was why he prayed three separate times, saying, **“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou”** (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Yet he endured it all willingly so that he could become our Redeemer to save our souls, and that was because he loves us. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

Jesus in agony

- **And an agent from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. And having become in agony he prayed more intensely, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:43-44).**

Jesus was in extreme agony during this time. According to the Bible record this was the most severe agony that Jesus ever experienced. Indeed, it was much more severe than his actual crucifixion. It was because of that severity that God sent one of his agents to strengthen him. Remember, after Jesus suffered forty days of fasting and temptations by the devil in the wilderness God sent agents to serve him. He needed serving because of the extreme weakness of his body caused by the fasting.

How the agent strengthened Jesus when he was praying before his betrayal is not described. He probably strengthened him with words of encouragement and hope. For this

would be his last act of suffering necessary to become the Redeemer of our souls. And it would also defeat God's greatest adversary, the devil, who would then be cast out of heaven. Jesus' suffering that way before his trial and crucifixion was so unique and severe that we cannot fully appreciate it. It even cause his body to sweat profusely.

Notice, however, the record does not say he sweat blood. It says **"his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground."** His sweat became *like* drops of blood, not blood itself. Nevertheless, the stress of facing his betrayal and crucifixion was so great for him that he did sweat enough to cause it to fall from his body like drops of blood. And that indicates it was of the most severe level of mental stress.

His disciples sleep

- **And after rising up from his prayer, having come to the disciples, he found them sleeping from sorrow. And said to them, Why sleep ye? Having risen, pray that ye may not enter into temptation** (Luke 22:45-46).

Jesus chided them gently for being asleep because that was an extraordinary time. Those men were very confused and sorrowful about what Jesus said was going to happen. And in the quietness and darkness of the night they had difficulty keeping themselves awake. Who has never fallen asleep against his will?

What was the temptation that Jesus warned them against? He was probably speaking of the temptation they would face to forsake him altogether, not just that night. For after Jesus was arrested, the apostles hid themselves for several days to avoid similar treatment by the Jews. It would have been easier for them to just give up and abandon their faith in Jesus. But they did not do that. They kept together in hiding, not knowing what else to do. For they still did not expect him to rise from the dead and come back to them. They probably thought the rising from the dead he spoke about was his Spirit being taken to heaven.

Nevertheless, his lesson about praying to keep from entering into temptation is applicable to us all. We should never relax our spiritual guard against the threats of temptation. And prayer helps us. We should never lose our faith in the power of prayer.

His betrayer comes

- **While he yet spoke, behold, a multitude, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them. And he came near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him, Judas, thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?** (Luke 22:47-48).

Betraying Jesus with a kiss was an extreme example of hypocrisy. A kiss is an act of affection, while betrayal is an act of extreme rejection. A kiss is an act of love, while betrayal is an act of hate. And even Jesus seemed surprised that Judas would be that hypocritical. There were several times when Jesus was surprised by the actions of people. Sometimes he was pleasantly surprised, and sometimes he was disappointed. Unlike what is commonly believed, Jesus was not all knowing while he was in his body of flesh.

One apostle uses a sword

- **And when those who were around him saw what would be, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? And a certain one of them struck the bondman of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. But having answered, Jesus said, Allow ye as far as this. And having touched his ear, he healed him (Luke 22:49-51).**

The biography of Jesus by John says that Peter is the one who struck the bondman of the high priest with the sword (see John 18:10). After the man was healed he probably thought he had not really had his ear cut off. Remember, this was at night, and there was much excitement at that time.

Jesus would not allow his apostles to defend him by force. Therefore, he commanded them against it. During his trial Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus said to him, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here”** (John 18:36). That is why the church does not use carnal force in its war against evil. For ours is a spiritual war, a war for the hearts and souls of men, not their bodies only. And our weapon is the **“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17). It is the duty of rulers of governments to combat evil with carnal force (see Romans 13:1-6).

God did not force Jesus to submit to his trial and crucifixion. And no doubt God would have saved him if he had asked him. However, Jesus chose to suffer that way so that he could fully obey the will of God and give us the way of salvation. For that was the only way we could be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins with the devil and the demons.

And that salvation had been prophesied from the beginning. Moreover, his suffering that way had also been prophesied. For Isaiah said about him, **“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth”** (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus shames those who arrested him

- **And Jesus said to the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and elders, who came to him, Have ye come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, ye did not stretch forth hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness (Luke 22:52-53).**

It is obvious that none of those men who were sent from the chief priests and the elders of the Jews believed in him. Otherwise they would not have done it. Jesus shamed those men, not for arresting him, but for the way they came. He made it clear to them that they came in a cowardly way, justifying themselves by acting like he was a criminal. And their rulers were cowards, because they feared to take him openly.

This whole world can be called the sinner's hour and the power of darkness. As the apostle John said, **"We know that we are of God, and the whole world is set in the evil"** (First John 5:19). Darkness symbolizes deceit, and deceit is able to create much evil.

Darkness is the absence of light, preventing us from knowing what is happening. And that causes us to stumble. And deceit darkens our knowledge and our understanding of what is really true. And that causes us to stumble.

The longer I live in this world, the more I can see how it is filled with deceit. It is used more or less by every sinner. Indeed, most if not all of them only condemn deceit when it is used against them. For the world, it is only wrong to be caught doing it, and even then they usually make light of it.

Peter denies Jesus

- **And having seized him, they led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed from afar. And having kindled a fire in the midst of the court, and having sat down together, Peter sat in the midst of them. But a certain servant girl having seen him sitting near the light, and having looked intently upon him, she said, This man was also with him. But he denied him, saying, Woman, I do not know him.**
- **And after a little while, another man having seen him, said, Thou also art from them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.**
- **And about one hour having passed, some other man insisted, saying, In truth this man was also with him, for he is also a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I do not know what thou art saying.**
- **And immediately, while he still spoke, a cock sounded. And having turned, the Lord looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said to him, Before a cock sounds thou wilt deny me thrice. And having gone outside, Peter wept bitterly (Luke 22:54-62).**

That was the only time in his life that Peter denied Jesus. And he never lost faith in him. I believe Jesus allowed Peter to be tempted that way because Peter disputed with him. And it was a way to both humble Peter, and teach him that Jesus is never wrong.

After Peter remembered what Jesus said about denying him, he went outside and wept bitterly. He wept bitterly because he did not want to fail Jesus. The weakness of his flesh caused him to stumble. Peter loved Jesus, and he wept bitterly because he failed him. Nevertheless, that experience not only humbled Peter, but it increased his faith in him, so that from then on he always accepted what Jesus said, even if he did not understand it.

The beginning of his abuse

- **And the men who held Jesus mocked him, while striking him. And having covered him, they struck his face, and demanded him, saying, Prophecy!**

Who is he who struck thee? And they spoke many other things against him, railing against him (Luke 22:63-65).

Abusing Jesus that way shows how uncivilized were those rulers of the Jews. No American judge would ever treat a prisoner that way, even when he was found guilty. If any judge did those things he would be impeached, and probably even charged with assault.

Luke says they covered his face when they demanded he prophesy who struck him. John also says that Jesus had been bound by those who arrested him: **“So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound him ...”** (John 18:12). Binding a prisoner is used against dangerous criminals. They bound Jesus only to humiliate him.

Jesus acknowledges he is the Christ

- **And when it became day, the eldership of the people, the chief priests, and the scholars, came together, and led him into their council, saying, If thou are the Christ, tell us. And he said to them, If I tell you, ye will not believe, and if I also ask, ye will, no, not answer nor release. From henceforth the Son of man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God.**
- **And they all said, Therefore thou are the Son of God? And he said to them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What further need have we of testimony? For we have heard from his mouth** (Luke 22:66-71).

The rulers of the people, in their council asked Jesus directly if he was the Christ. Jesus knew that whatever answer he gave it would make no difference to them. If he told them directly they would still not believe in him. And if he asked them, they would not answer him, just as they had done in the past. Neither would they release him. Hence, whatever answer he gave would have no effect, and he told them he knew it.

In desperation the high priest asked him directly if he was the Christ, the Son of God. And Jesus did not hesitate to say he was. Matthew quoted Jesus responding with the words, **“Thou have said”** (Matthew 26:64), which means yes. Mark quoted Jesus saying, **“I am”** (Mark 14:62). Luke quotes Jesus saying, **“Ye say that I am,”** which also means yes.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke used slightly different words when they quoted Jesus' answer to the high priest. (John does not report that dialogue.) That is further evidence that in the Bible it is the meaning of what a man says, and not his exact words that are important when he is quoted. That is more evidence to justify translating the Bible to other languages.

Nevertheless, translators do not have the right to paraphrase the Bible record. They are obligated to translate as literally as possible within the limits of the languages. The authors of the Bible were divinely inspired, and therefore had the approval of the Holy Spirit to paraphrase. Translators are not divinely inspired and do not have that approval. The so-called dynamic equivalent method of translating (which means much paraphrasing and loose translating) that is used so frequently in modern translations is a perversion.

When Jesus answered the high priest, he also emphasized his claim by prophesying that they would see him sitting at the right hand of the power of God. His confession about being the Christ was enough to condemn him in the sight of those men, because they did not believe him. That gave them their excuse to forgo any more witnesses in their sham trial.

Remember, in the Bible the chronological order of events is not always considered significant. Consider this example. According to Matthew, in his trial before the Jewish council Jesus first confessed being the Christ. Then he told the council, **“Nevertheless I say to you, Henceforth ye will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of the sky.”** After which they condemned him. However, according to Luke, Jesus first told the council, **“From henceforth the Son of man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God.”** Then he confessed being the Christ, after which they condemned him.

Those kinds of differences are not uncommon in the Bible. Why the Holy Spirit of God inspired those men to write that way is not told. However, like the ambiguity of God’s very existence, they offer ways to test our faith. Such things allow scoffers to justify their scoffing, and they allow believers to find solutions to strengthen their faith.

Petty things like this merely challenge those who believe God and his word to find the explanation, and that way we learn more. Scoffers never learn because they are too committed to their scoffing. As Solomon said, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding”** (Proverbs 14:6).

Jesus is accused before Pilate

- **And having risen, the whole company of them led him to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying himself to be Christ, a king.**
- **And Pilate questioned him, saying, Are thou the king of the Jews? And having answered him, he said, Thou say. And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, I find nothing guilty in this man** (Luke 23:1-4).

Remember, it was necessary for the rulers of the Jews to persuade the Roman governor to crucify Jesus. For the Romans did not allow them to put any man to death. Therefore, they brought Jesus to Pilate, and made false accusations against him, accusations of sedition, which they knew the Romans would not tolerate. When the governor asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews, Jesus said **“Thou say,”** which means yes.

The other biographers tell more about how Pilate examined Jesus. Luke simply gives Pilate’s judgment, saying that he found nothing guilty in him.

Jesus is sent to Herod

- **But they were emphatic, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, having begun from Galilee as far as here. And when Pilate heard Galilee, he questioned if the man is a Galilean. And when he perceived that**

he is from Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was himself also in Jerusalem in these days (Luke 23:5-7).

From the Bible record it is clear that governor Pilate did not want to crucify Jesus. Indeed, Pilate's wife told him she had suffered many things in a dream about Jesus, and urged him to have nothing to do with **"that righteous man"** (see Matthew 17:19). However, Pilate was subject to great pressure from the rulers of the Jews and the crowd that supported them. Therefore, he seized the opportunity to send Jesus to governor Herod. No doubt hoping that Herod would help him find a way to resolve his dilemma.

Herod interrogates Jesus

- **Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad, for he was wanting of a considerable time to see him, because of hearing many things about him, and he hoped to see some sign happening by him. And he interrogated him in considerable words, but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scholars had stood, vehemently accusing him (Luke 23:8-10).**

Herod was a very wicked man. Remember, he had beheaded John the immerser as a reward to the daughter of Herodias his unlawful wife. Herod wanted to see Jesus, but not to learn the truth of God. He wanted to see the man he had heard so much about, and he wanted to be entertained with some kind of magical show. Nevertheless, Jesus would not cater to him. Indeed, he even refused to speak to Herod. Notice how those chief priest and scholars continued to vehemently accuse Jesus. They were as wicked and vicious as Herod.

Herod mocks Jesus

- **But Herod having disdained him with his soldiers, and having mocked him, having arraying him in a bright robe, he sent him back to Pilate. And both Pilate and Herod became friends with each other on the same day, for they were formerly being at enmity toward themselves (Luke 23:11-12).**

Jesus would not entertain Herod with some magical show, and so Herod and his soldiers entertained themselves by mocking Jesus. Since Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews, they arrayed him in a bright robe; not to honor him, but to make him look ludicrous as a prisoner.

The passage says that Pilate and Herod had been at enmity toward themselves. It is common for rulers to be at enmity toward each other. There is often jealousy and power conflicts between them, which things were probably the cause of the enmity between Pilate and Herod. They became friends no doubt because Herod had been wanting for a long time to see Jesus, and Pilate gave him that opportunity.

Herod no doubt also concluded that Jesus' reputation was based upon myth and exaggeration, which would have helped relieve his concerns about him. All those things would have made him grateful to Pilate for sending Jesus to him.

Pilate resists crucifying Jesus

- **And Pilate having called together the chief priests, and the rulers, and the people, said to them, Ye brought this man to me as turning away the people. And behold, I, having examined him before you, found nothing guilty in this man of what ye accuse against him. But not even Herod, for I sent you back to him, and lo, nothing having been done by him is worthy of death. Therefore, having scourged I will release him (Luke 23:13-16).**

Pilate argued for releasing Jesus because he knew Jesus was innocent, and he even testified that Herod found no guilt in him. Nevertheless, in an attempt to pacify those rulers of the Jews he said he would scourge Jesus. That was further abuse against the already abused body of Jesus.

The tradition of releasing one prisoner

- **Now he had need to release one man to them at every feast (Luke 23:17).**

The law of Moses commanded the people to have three feasts annually, although the Jews have later added to that number. This particular feast, the Passover feast, was the first one commanded of them.

The Bible says nothing about the origin of the custom to release one prisoner during a feast. It was never part of the law of Moses. Indeed, it was actually against the justice promoted by the law. For there is nothing in the law of Moses about such pardons, although for some things a man could redeem himself with a ransom.

Here is one law about that: **“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death. If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him. Whether it has gored a son, or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him”** (Exodus 21:28-31). Apparently in such a case, the family of the victim was allowed to impose a ransom in place of the death penalty.

However, for crimes like murder and manslaughter (traditionally defined) no ransom could be given: **“Moreover ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And ye shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest”** (Numbers 35:31-32).

Nevertheless, whether just or not the governor agreed to that custom, no doubt to help pacify the Jews during the times of those gathers, which were the most dangerous ones for riots to occur against the Roman occupation.

The people reject Jesus

- **But they cried out all together, saying, Take away this man, and release to us Barabbas (a man who was cast into prison because of a certain insurrection that occurred in the city, and for murder). Again therefore Pilate called out wanting to release Jesus, but they shouted, saying, Crucify, crucify him.**
- **And he said to them a third time, For what evil did this man do? I have found nothing guilty of death in him. I will therefore, having scourged, release him (Luke 23:18-22).**

The resentment toward the Roman occupation was no doubt the reason for the insurrection in the city. It was obviously unsuccessful. The record does not say that Barabbas was a leader of it. The Romans had probably already executed the leaders. The text says that Barabbas had committed murder during the insurrection. Apparently the members of the insurrection went beyond fighting the Romans, and had also killed some innocent Jews.

Three times Pilate wanted to know what evil Jesus had done, because he found nothing guilty of death in him. He again offered to have Jesus scourged before releasing him. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the chief priests and the elders whipped the multitudes into a frenzy to crucify Jesus.

Being in a crowd can often have an almost hypnotic effect on people. And when they are led by the wrong men, crowds can become very irrational and dangerous. As Solomon said, **“Scoffers set a city in a flame, but wise men turn away wrath”** (Proverbs 29:8). And that seems to have been happening here, because the next passage says that the crowd was relentless with loud voices demanding Jesus be crucified.

Jesus is condemned to be crucified

- **But they were relentless with loud voices demanding him to be crucified. And their voices and those of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate decreed their request to happen. And he released the man who had been cast into prison because of insurrection and murder, whom they asked for, but he delivered Jesus to their will (Luke 23:23-25).**

Pilate saw the danger that was developing in the multitude, and so he released the notorious criminal and sent the innocent man Jesus to be crucified. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he even called him a righteous man. But Pilate was also a spiritually weak man without much character. And to protect himself he sacrificed an innocent man. Pilate was threatened by the crowd, because the rulers at Rome would have been angry with him if he had allowed an uproar to develop.

According to what I have read about the rulers of the Roman empire, they did not care how their subjects lived, as long as they were peaceful about it. And breaches of the peace were quickly and brutally crushed by their powerful army.

It is commonly taught in these modern times that the Romans crucified Jesus and not the Jews. However, to say that is very deceptive. The Roman governor would not have crucified Jesus if he had a choice, a non-threatening one. Pilate was guilty of having Jesus crucified, but he was much less guilty than the chief priests, the elders, and the multitude of Jews who were there.

The Jews were those who crucified Jesus, and they did it by the hands of the Romans. And they even preferred the release of a man guilty of insurrection and murder instead of Jesus. The chief priests of the Jews had manipulated the Jewish crowd to make those demands, but they all did it.

Help carrying his cross

- **And when they led him away, having taken hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian coming from the countryside, they laid the cross on him to bring behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).**

Each condemned prisoner was required to carry his own cross. However, Jesus had been subjected to so much abuse that his body was no longer able to carry it. His spirit was willing but his flesh was made too weak. It was weak because he was beset by the limitations of a body of flesh just like every other man.

Mark says that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Simon was drafted to carry Jesus' cross simply because he happened to be available. We know nothing more about him, because there were other men with those names mentioned in the New Testament.

Jesus prophesied to the women

- **And a great multitude of the people followed him, and also of women who bewailed and lamented him. But having turning to them, Jesus said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, instead weep for yourselves and for your children.**
- **Because, behold, the days are coming, during which they will say, Blessed are the barren, and the bellies that gave no birth, and the breasts that did not suckle. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us. Because if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry? (Luke 23:27-31).**

As he always had, Jesus was more concerned about others than he was about himself. Those women were sorrowing for him. But he warned them to sorrow for themselves and their children, because terrible disasters were coming against them. Those terrible disasters were brought upon them by the Roman army, which came to destroy Jerusalem and carry away the small remnant of the survivors.

Those disasters would be so severe that having the responsibility of being a mother would be a terrible burden. And the people would even cry out to the mountains and the hills to fall and cover them. Remember, Jesus described some of those disasters to his disciples when they asked him about the end.

Jesus' reference to the green tree and the dry was figurative. He was being so unjustly crucified in relatively peaceful and prosperous times. If those wicked rulers would be so unjust and cruel during good times, what would they do when times were evil? They would be even more unjust and cruel. Therefore, those weeping women should weep for themselves and their children, because those evil times were coming.

Jesus is crucified

- **And two other men, malefactors, were also led with him to be executed. And when they came to the place called Skull, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one at the right hand and the other at the left.**
- **And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing. And dividing his garments, they cast a lot** (Luke 23:32-34).

The place called Skull is also called Golgotha in Matthew 27:33, and also in John 18:17 which says Golgotha is a Hebrew word. There are many theories that attempt to explain the name.

That passage says two malefactors were led with him to be executed. However, there is evidence farther on that more than two other men were being crucified at the same time.

Crucifying him in the presence of his enemies, and dividing his garments and casting a lot, were all prophesied: **“For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot”** (Psalm 22:16-18).

The book of John says they divided all of his garments except for his tunic. His tunic was a seamless weave, which is why they did not want to divide it, but instead they cast a lot for it (See John 19:23-24). Dividing his garments meant he was crucified naked.

Who Jesus asked the Father to forgive is not clear. Jesus asked them to be forgiven because they knew not what they were doing. He may have just meant the Roman soldiers there, or he could have meant everyone involved. A passage by Paul suggests Jesus even included the rulers who ordered his crucifixion, because Paul said they would not have done it if they understood: **“But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”** (First Corinthians 2:7-8).

They mocked him

- **And the people had stood watching. And also the rulers with them sneered, saying, He saved others. He should save himself, if this is the Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, approaching, and bringing him vinegar, and saying, If thou are the king of the Jews, save thyself** (Luke 23:35-37).

The rulers were able to crucify Jesus because they arrested him away from the temple and those who supported him. They were able because most of the Jews were largely indifferent to Jesus and his preaching about the kingdom of God. That is why the people of Jerusalem did not rise up in protest when Jesus was crucified. You may not be aware that the majority of modern Jews are atheists, including the Israelis.

Openly sneering and mocking a dying criminal is something that would not be tolerated in America. Ours is a more civilized society, even during these times of moral and spiritual decadence. The rulers of the Jews told Jesus to save himself if he was the Christ, the chosen of God. Remember, their belief about what Christ would be like was completely false. They thought he would be a mighty warrior-king. The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus because in their eyes his claim of being the king of the Jews was ridiculous.

Vinegar is sour wine, and it was probably commonly given to those being crucified to give them a little relief. Perhaps also it was given to help silence crucified men who were crying out because of their suffering.

The inscription over his head

- **And there was also an inscription over him written in letters, in Greek and Latin and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS** (Luke 23:38).

The complete words of the accusation over his head were, THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. We know that the words “Jesus the Nazarene” were also there, because they were included in John’s record of the accusation (see John 19:19). Remember, it is often necessary to read other passages in order to obtain more complete or detailed information about things in the Bible. Never expect a passage about something in the Bible to always be complete about the subject.

Therefore, beware of false teachers, because they commonly quote one or two passages to justify what they say, when further reading shows their conclusions to be false. Study the Bible for yourself, because you are going to be judged by what you do.

One malefactor defends Jesus

- **And one of the malefactors who were hanged railed him, saying, If thou are the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other man having answered, rebuking him, saying, Thou fear not even God, since thou are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive worthy of what we did, but this man did nothing amiss.**
- **And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou come into thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Truly I say to thee, today thou will be with me in the paradise** (Luke 23:39-43).

Matthew says, “**Then two robbers are crucified with him, one at the right hand and one at the left And also the robbers who were crucified with him reviled him the same way**” (Matthew 27:38, 44). And Mark says, “**And they crucify two robbers with**

him, one at his right hand, and one at his left And those who were crucified with him reviled him" (Mark 15:27,32). John's record also says, **"... they crucified him, and two others with him, on this side and that, and Jesus in the middle"** (John 19:18).

Both Matthew and Mark say that the robbers reviled Jesus. Yet Luke says that one of them defended him. Some have suggested the one who defended him suddenly changed his mind. However, that does not seem to fit the passages about them. I believe there were more than just two men being crucified with him. Jesus was crucified between two of them, but there were apparently others being crucified around them.

Neither Matthew, Mark, nor John say that both of the two men he was being crucified between reviled him. Matthew says, **"... the robbers who were crucified with him reviled him ... ,"** while Mark says, **"And those who were crucified with him reviled him,"** and John does not even mention any of them reviling him. Therefore, I believe one of the robbers or malefactors that Jesus was between never did revile him. He was the one who defended the innocence of Jesus, and asked to be remembered.

That malefactor may have been part of a group seeking to overthrow the Roman government, and was not just a common robber. He was probably a righteous man who was very zealous of Israel. And his zeal led him to perform acts against the occupying Romans. Nevertheless, even if that is true, he knew the risks of rebellion, and he accepted the justice of his condemnation. He probably accepted the justice of it because he and the others in their zeal did things that also hurt the Jews.

Moreover, he had probably heard of Jesus and his righteousness, and he approved of him. Indeed, from what he said to Jesus he believed in him, because he said, **"... Lord, when thou come into thy kingdom."** Therefore, it was appropriate for Jesus to speak those words to him. For that malefactor confessed him before men. And remember, Jesus had said, **"And I say to you, every man who will confess in me before men, the Son of man will also confess in him before the agents of God ..."** (Luke 12:8).

What Jesus meant by the paradise they would both be in that very day is a mystery and I can only conjecture about it. You can read my conjectures about paradise in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The curtain of the temple is torn

- **And it was about the sixth hour, and darkness occurred over the whole land until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the curtain of the temple was torn in the middle** (Luke 23:44-45).

Remember, the Jewish days began and ended at 6 AM. Hence, the sixth hour was noon and the ninth hour was three PM. That means darkness occurred during the general time of maximum daylight. That darkness symbolized the spiritual ignorance that caused the Jews to reject and crucify the Son of God.

That curtain of the temple was no doubt the one that separated the holy place from the most holy place (also called the holy of holies). The most holy place was where the ark of the covenant was kept. Only the high priest was allowed in there, and that was only for one

day per year, which was on the day of atonement. Only the priests were allowed in the holy place, but they went in there every day of the year.

Christians are now the priests of God, and the new holy place is the church. Christ is our high priest, and heaven is now the most holy place. And the torn curtain symbolizes our access to heaven through the blood of Christ, which access we enter when we too are resurrected for the afterlife. The book of Hebrews tells much more about those things.

Jesus dies

- **And Jesus, having sounded out in a great voice, said, Father, into thy hands I entrust my spirit. And having said these things, he expired. And when the centurion saw that which happened, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was righteous.**
- **And all the multitudes who came together to this scene, watching that which happened, turned back, beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances, and the women who accompanied him from Galilee, had stood from afar, seeing these things** (Luke 23:46-49).

Our bodies die but our spirits live on. And what happens to our spirits when our body perishes depends upon the judgment of God. Jesus entrusted his spirit to his heavenly Father because he had always remained faithful to him, and God received him in heaven. And we who are faithful to God when we die will be received in heaven by him also. Unrepentant sinners will be rejected by him and cast into the lake of fire called hell.

There was a mixed multitude that witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. Many were there to mock and deride him because they hated him, including the rulers of the Jews. However, some were there to mourn and beat their breasts because they loved him. Faithful women who had accompanied him from Galilee were there.

Remember what Luke had said earlier about those women: **“And it came to pass that he traveled through, by city and village in succession, announcing and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, and the twelve men with him, and certain women who were healed from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many other women who served them from the things they possessed”** (Luke 8:1-3).

His faithful apostles would also have been there, but their lives were in peril. Only John was there because he was known by the high priest (see John 18:15). The women were not in danger because the rulers had no fear of them.

The centurion witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, which means he saw many of the things that happened. His heart was obviously not hardened against Jesus, and so, unlike the rulers of the Jews, he could objectively judge those events. Indeed, that humble Roman soldier was more righteous than all of those rulers of the Jews, because **“he glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was righteous”** (Luke 23:47).

He was obviously not among the soldiers that mocked Jesus. There is always a minority of people who love justice and righteousness. That Roman soldier was one of them because he judged Jesus rightly. And we can only hope that he eventually became a disciple of his.

Jesus is buried

- **And behold a man named Joseph, a council member, being a good and righteous man (this man not having consented to their purpose and deed), was from Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who also himself awaited the kingdom of God. This man having gone to Pilate, requested the body of Jesus.**
- **And having taken it down, he wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher cut in rock, of which no man was yet lain. And the day was Preparation; sabbath was beginning (Luke 23:50-54).**

That sepulcher was an artificial cave created by Joseph from Arimathaea (see Matthew 17:69). Both natural and artificial caves were commonly used as sepulchers. For example, the Bible says “**Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan**” (Genesis 23:19).

That passage in Luke says Joseph of Arimathaea had not consented to their purpose and deed, referring to the Jewish council wanting to have Jesus crucified. Being a councilman and owning his own sepulcher indicates he was a wealthy man. And remember, Jesus had said to his disciples that it was not easy for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (see Luke 18:25).

It not only took strong character for Joseph to become a disciple of Christ, but it took great courage for him to bury Jesus in his own new sepulcher. It took courage because the rulers of the Jews learned about it.

The day of Preparation was Friday because the law of Moses forbade food preparation on the sabbath.

The command to rest on the sabbath

- **And having followed closely, the women who were gathered to him out of Galilee, they saw the sepulcher, and how his body was laid. And having returned, they prepared spices and ointments. And they indeed rested on the sabbath according to the commandment (Luke 23:55-56).**

The women wanted to immediately anoint Jesus' body with spices and ointments, but the law of Moses commanded them to rest on the seventh day of the week. And since Jesus was buried late on the sixth day of the week the women did not have time to prepare and then return to anoint him. Therefore, in obedience to the command they rested, even though their hearts no doubt longed to anoint him as soon as they were able.

Even though we who believe in him know that our spirits are eternal, we know that our bodies must return to the dust. Yet before our bodies begin to decay those who love us still

have a strong attraction to our bodies. They are attracted because that was where our spirits were housed while we were alive. And the associations and memories that develop between our bodies and our spirits is very strong. And God approves displays of affection (dignified and prudent ones) toward our deceased bodies. The Bible contains many examples.

Regarding his resurrection

There were many other things that happened during the time of his resurrection. Each of the four biographies of Jesus give their own individual reports, all of which vary about some things. I put all of what they testified together in a summary, which you can read in my commentary of John's biography of him (see John 20).

The women learn he was raised

- **And on the first day of the week, very early morning, they came to the sepulcher bringing the spices that they prepared, and some women with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And having entered in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.**
- **And it came to pass while they were bewildered about this, that behold, two men stood near them in shining apparel. And since they became frightened and bowing down their face to the ground, they said to them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but was raised. Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day to rise. And they remembered his sayings (Luke 24:1-8).**

The next passage says there were several women who brought the prepared spices, and it names three of them. The passage says that they entered into the sepulcher. That means the sepulcher must have been a fairly large space.

Matthew mentions one agent from heaven who rolled the stone away from the door (see Matthew 28:2), while Luke says the women saw two of them. Hence, there were two but only one rolled the stone away. Matthew simply did not mention the other one.

The women were naturally frightened, and they showed their respect for those agents by bowing down to them. The agents asked them why they sought the living among the dead. The agents told them that Jesus was raised, and they reminded the women that Jesus said that would happen the third day.

If the women had understood what Jesus said about him being raised the third day, then they would not have sought him in the sepulcher—the living among the dead. Remember however, neither the men nor the women knew what Jesus meant when he spoke to them about rising the third day. Jesus told them several times that he was going to be abused by sinful men and be killed, but would rise the third day, even as far back as when they were in Galilee. And when the agents reminded the women, they did remember.

They reported to the others

- **And having returned from the sepulcher, they reported all these things to the eleven, and to all the others.**
- **Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. And their sayings appeared before them as idle talk, and they disbelieved them. But having risen, Peter ran to the sepulcher. And having stooped down, he sees the linen cloths laying alone. And he departed, wondering to himself at that which happened (Luke 24:9-12).**

The women faithfully obeyed the agents from heaven and reported what they learned to the others. Yet none of the others believed them; they thought it was idle talk. They may even have thought it was wishful thinking that created vivid imaginations in those mourning women, which they mistook as real. Such things do happen to people.

The apostles had never understood the prophecy that Jesus gave about his death and resurrection, and they still did not understand. They thought his body was dead for good. Nevertheless, Peter did go and check the tomb, and he wondered about what happened. He still could not believe that Jesus was resurrected in the flesh. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in a tomb more than three days (see John 11). Yet apparently they could not understand how and why God would allow Jesus to be crucified and then raise his body from the dead.

Jesus appears to two of them

- **And behold, two of them were going the same day to a village that was sixty furlongs away from Jerusalem, which name was Emmaus. And they conversed with each other about all these things that happened. And it came to pass, while they conversed and discussed, that Jesus himself also having approached, went along with them. But their eyes were held, not to recognize him (Luke 24:13-16).**

How Jesus appeared to those men is not known. He seemed to have appeared as an ordinary man to them, but they did not recognize him as Jesus. There are many things that can reduce our recognition of people. Dark clouds can reduce the light of day, and different manners of dress can sometimes reduce recognition. Perhaps the body of Jesus was so ordinary looking that many men looked similar to him. And that would have misled those two men from recognizing him. Of course, Jesus could also have changed the form of his face.

One furlong is an eighth of a mile. Hence, they were going to a village that was seven and a half miles from Jerusalem. It takes about two and a half hours to walk that distance. Those men had heard the report of the women, and were conversing with each other about all the things that happened; namely, the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and the report from the women about his resurrection.

They told how they were puzzled about Jesus

- **And he said to them, What are these words that ye toss back to each other, while walking and are looking sad. And one, whose name was Cleopas, having answered, said to him, Thou only visit Jerusalem and do not know the things that happened in it during these days? And he said to them, What?**
- **And they said to him, The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who became a prophet, a mighty man in work and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up for condemnation of death, and crucified him. But we hoped that he is the man who is going to redeem Israel.**
- **But even with all these things, it brings this third day today from which time these things happened. But also some of our women astonished us, having come to be at the sepulcher early morning. And not having found his body, they came, saying also to have seen a vision of agents who say he is alive. And some of those with us went to the sepulcher, and found it this way, just as also the women said, but they did not see him (Luke 24:17-24).**

Of the two men, only Cleopas was named, and he is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible except when his wife was named when John was describing the crucifixion: **“And his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene had stood near the cross of Jesus”** (John 19:25).

Cleopas’ wife Mary was said to be the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. (I say more about that in my comments about that passage in John’s biography of Jesus.) Both of those men must have been actively involved with Jesus’ ministry, because they heard the report from the women about his resurrection.

They thought the man questioning them must have been a stranger, since he seemed unaware of what happened to Jesus. From their response we can conclude that the news about Jesus’ crucifixion was spread throughout the population. They then told the man (Jesus) about Jesus, and how they believed in him. They openly confessed him before that “stranger.” They hoped that Jesus was the man who was going to redeem Israel. The coming redeemer had been prophesied in the Old Testament, and all the Jews were aware of it. And unknown to them at that time Jesus was truly the Redeemer, the man who redeemed all mankind (all who will accept him) and not just Israel.

They also told how their chief priests and rulers were chiefly responsible for having him crucified. They did not even mention the involvement of the Roman governor, although later passages show how Christians did hold Pilate the Roman governor partly responsible (see Acts 4:27).

They also told how astonished they were at the report of the women. All who heard the women may have dismissed their report as idle talk, but it still astonished them. Luke only mentions Peter going to the tomb. However, John says he went with Peter to the tomb (see

John 20:3-4). And there may have been others that were never mentioned. Remember, the Bible record is of necessity very condensed, with most of the detail omitted.

The two men said the report of the women was confirmed by those who went, except for the part about Jesus being raised, because they did not see him. Neither did the men see the heavenly agents at the tomb or they would have reported it.

Jesus teaches them

- **And he said to them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke. Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things about himself (Luke 24:25-27).**

There are many prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. Here is the one Jehovah gave to Moses: **“I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.**

“But the prophet, who shall speak a word presumptuously in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who shall speak in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:18-20).

Notice how Jesus used the scriptures from the Bible to teach them. Remember, Jesus also quoted scriptures to counter the temptations that the devil gave him in the wilderness. Jesus spoke with authority, and his teachings became new scriptures, which have been recorded in the New Testament for us. However, Jesus also used the scriptures of the Old Testament in his teachings. Those two testaments work together to give us the entire word of God. It is foolish for Christians to neglect the truth and wisdom of the Old Testament just because we are not subject to the law of Moses.

Their eyes were opened

- **And they came near to the village where they were going, and he pretended to go further. And they constrained him, saying, Remain with us, because it is toward evening, and the day has declined. And he went in to remain with them. And it came to pass during his dining with them, that, having taken the bread, he blessed, and having broken in pieces he gave to them.**
- **And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he became invisible from them. And they said to each other, Was not our heart burning within us while he spoke to us on the way, while he opened to us the scriptures? (Luke 24:28-32).**

Jesus was not being deceitful when he concealed his identity and pretended to go further. Deceitfulness is evil and harmful to those it is used against. One of the great teachings of the New Testament is that we are not subject to a legal system with God. As disciples of

Christ, with motives of good will, we are under the law of liberty. For James said, **“So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty”** (James 2:12). And the law of liberty is not legalistic. Hence, we are free to act according to whatever is expedient for righteousness, and not according to fixed rules. And the harmless deception use by Jesus was not wrong. He used it to help those men.

Therefore dear reader, do not judge Christians by a set of rigid laws, but by the consequences of what they do. Remember what Jesus said about our fruits: **“But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves. From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits”** (Matthew 7:15-17).

And even things like deception can sometimes be used to do good. Nevertheless, we should always be exceedingly careful about using such things as deception, and be fully justified when we do, lest we be condemned. You can read much more about how Christ freed us from legalism with God in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

It was during his breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened and they recognized him. How their eyes were opened depends upon how Jesus concealed himself. And remember, we can only conjecture about that. How Jesus became invisible to them seems clearer; he simply vanished. Appearing suddenly and vanishing suddenly was commonly done by heavenly agents sent from God, and there are several examples of it reported in the Bible.

The hearts of those two men were burning within them as he taught them, because he enlighten and encouraged them. He changed their sadness to hope and wonder by showing from the word of God how the suffering and death of Jesus was a victory and not a defeat. It had all been prophesied to happen. And the word of God can enlighten and encourage us as well. For it teaches us that our sufferings and sorrows done for God and his righteousness are victory for us and not defeat.

Remember these wonderful words of Paul, **“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace, which has multiplied because of the thankfulness of the many, may abound for the glory of God. Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day.**

For our slight momentary affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory from extraordinariness to extraordinariness, while we look not at things seen, but at things not seen. For things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal” (Second Corinthians 4:15-18).

They returned and reported to the others

- **And having risen up the same hour, they returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them who said, The Lord really was raised, and was seen by Simon. And they reported the things on the road, and how he was made known to them during the breaking of the bread** (Luke 24:33-35).

No doubt those two men were much too excited to attempt sleep. Therefore, they proceeded in the dark of the night to return to Jerusalem and report that wonderful experience to the others. And their report reinforced the evidence given by others who said that the Lord really was raised.

What was meant by **“The Lord ... was seen by Simon”** is not known. Hence, we can only conjecture. When Paul was describing the crucifixion of Jesus, he said, **“For I delivered to you at first what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he arose on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also slept. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the untimely birth, he also appeared to me”** (First Corinthians 15:3-8).

According to Paul Jesus first appeared to Cephas, who was also called Simon Peter. Of course, that does not include his appearances to Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher, and to the other women who had been there. Peter was apparently the first man he appeared to after his resurrection. However, none of the New Testament historians (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) describe when and how that happened. Consequently, we can only wonder.

The reason Jesus appeared to Peter before any of the other men may have been to show him compassion. For Peter had to bear the dual shock of Jesus' death plus his own denials of him. Those things were no doubt extremely depressing and discouraging to him.

Therefore, I suspect Jesus appeared to him first before the other men because Peter needed more encouraging. For Jesus was relying upon Peter to use the keys of the kingdom to open its doors after Jesus ascended into heaven. He also needed Peter to be active in promoting the growth of the early church. For when Jesus appeared to Peter and some others on the beach, he said to Peter that if he loved him, then he was to feed his sheep and his lambs, referring to our souls.

Jesus appears to them all

- **And as they spoke these things, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and says to them, Peace to you. But having been startled, and having become frightened, they presumed to see a spirit. And he said to them, Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as ye see me having. And having said this, he displayed to them his hands and feet** (Luke 24:36-40).

Jesus must have appeared to them instantly without entering through a door or other ways of entry. Thus, they were startled, troubled, and frightened. They presumed to see a spirit, because how could a body of flesh appear to them that way? Nevertheless, Jesus had truly appeared to them in his body of flesh, which had been resurrected. And it still contained the injuries to his hands and feet that he was given when he was crucified. And he even invited them to handle him to confirm it was his body of flesh that had been crucified.

Jesus proves he is in his body of flesh

- **And while they still disbelieved from joy and wondering, he said to them, Have ye anything to eat here? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and from a bees honeycomb. And having taken it, he ate before them (Luke 24:41-43).**

Even while they were still full of doubts, they experienced joy and wonder at his presence. They would have rejoiced at his presence whether it was his body of flesh or not. Nevertheless, Jesus wanted them to know that he had truly been resurrected in his body of flesh. And he even asked for something to eat as further proof of it. That is the only reason he asked for food, to prove it was his body of flesh. They needed to know that because they were going to be his witnesses to the world.

Jesus tells how it was all prophesied

- **And he said to them, These are the words that I spoke to you while still being with you, that it is necessary for all things that are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms about me to be fulfilled.**
- **Then he opened their mind to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and to proclaim in his name repentance and remission of sins for all the nations, having begun from Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-47).**

There are many prophecies about the Christ in the Old Testament and Jesus fulfilled them all. He had warned his apostles many times about his suffering and death at the hands of sinners. However, they never did understand. Therefore, Jesus now helped them to understand, and he used passages from the Old Testament because they were familiar with those words.

He also taught them that it is now necessary to proclaim in his name repentance and remission of sin for all the nations. And it must begin from Jerusalem. For those prophecies had not yet been fulfilled. It would be their duty as his apostles to fulfill them.

He gives them instructions

- **And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you. But stay ye in the city until ye are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:48-49).**

Not only were they his apostles, but they were witnesses to the resurrection of his body of flesh. Therefore, Jesus was going to send forth upon them the promise of God his Father. That promise was probably the one that God made to Abraham, about which the record says, **“And when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.**

“And Abram fell on his face. And God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shall be the father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:1-4). And that multitude of nations is the worldwide church, because Paul said that Abraham was the father of us all—all the faithful (see Romans 4:16).

The power from on high they would be clothed with was the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had earlier called the helper. For Jesus said to them at the last supper, **“But when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, that will testify about me. And ye also testify, because ye have been with me from the beginning”** (John 15:26-27). And that first happened on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2).

He ascends to heaven in their sight

- **And he led them outside as far as to Bethany, and having lifted up his hands, he blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was brought up into heaven** (Luke 24:50-51).

While Jesus was blessing his disciples he was raised up into the sky to return to heaven to sit in his throne with God. And Paul said we who are faithful to him will also be raised to heaven: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God.**

“And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (First Thessalonians 4:15-18).

They rejoice and worship God

- **And having worshipping him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Truly** (Luke 24:52-53).

Jesus told his apostles during the last supper they would have joy after their sorrow. He said to them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that ye will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. Ye will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will become into joy. When a woman brings forth she has pain because her hour has come. But when she has given birth to the child she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a man was born into the world.**

“And now therefore indeed ye have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no man takes your joy away from you” (John 16:20-22).

And we too, who sorrow in this world as we struggle to live righteously in obedience to him, will have joy. And no man will take that joy away from us. Therefore, we too should continually praise and bless God in our hearts.

A Commentary on The Biography of Jesus by John

The author of this biography of Jesus was identified by the early church patriarchs as the apostle John. He never names himself in the text. John only refers to himself with descriptions such as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” or “the other disciple.”

When John referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” he was by no means claiming that he was the only disciple Jesus loved. John was much too humble to make such a claim. Moreover, John was not the only man identified that way. For when Lazarus was sick, his sisters sent to Jesus, saying, “**Lord, behold, he whom thou love is sick**” (John 11:3). That expression was probably used to show the strong feelings of love that Jesus had toward his disciples. And when John applied it to himself he was rejoicing that he was included in that love, not singling himself out as the only one.

This biography of Jesus was probably written after the other three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). That may be why it reads so much differently (but not contradictory) from the other three. Perhaps John wanted to record other important information about the life of Jesus.

Some of the comments I make here in this biography of Jesus are what I said about the same events that are recorded in the other three biographies of him.

In the beginning was the Word

- **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be** (John 1:1-3).

John was speaking about Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus was probably called the Word because he is the means by which God communicated with man. He was with God and he was God—God the Son. He is not God the Father, he is the only begotten Son of God. And he was begotten before time began, before anything else existed. For it was through him that all things came to be. God used him as a co-creator.

God planned all things, and together with his Son they created all things. That is why the Creation record reads this way about us: “**And God said, Let us make man in our image—after our likeness ...**” (Genesis 1:26). Notice how it says “**Let us make man in our image ...**.” Moreover, Paul said to the Ephesians that it was “**God who created all things through Jesus Christ**” (Ephesians 3:9). Therefore, all things came to be through the Son of God, who was with God in the beginning, creating with him.

In him was life and light

- **In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it** (John 1:4-5).

Light symbolizes truth and righteousness, while darkness symbolizes sin and ignorance. Remember, all things came through the Son (with God the Father), including life. And his own life was our light, because he came to bring truth and righteousness to this dark and sinful world. Yet this dark and sinful world did not understand him nor did they accept him. Indeed, the world still does not accept the authentic Christ. What the great majority of believers accept is a popular mythical version of him, not the true Christ. But anyone who studies the Bible can learn about the genuine Christ.

John the immerser

- **A man came to be who was sent from God, his name was John. This man came for testimony so that he might testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. That man was not the light, but that he might testify about the light (John 1:6-8).**

Instead of using names of the Son of God in his testimony here about him, the apostle John chose to refer to him as the light. It is a beautiful way to describe Jesus Christ the Son of God, because he truly did enlighten our hearts about the most important things in our lives. And the most important of them all is the hope he gave us of eternal life in heaven as sons of God.

Isaiah had prophesied that God would send a man to come before the Christ to testify about him: **“The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places smooth. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it”** (Isaiah 40:3-5). And that man was John the immerser. Luke’s biography of Jesus tells much more about him (see Luke 1 and 3).

Power to become children of God

- **He was the true light coming into the world that enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, and the world knew him not. He came to his own, and his own did not accept him.**
- **But as many as did accept him, to them he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were begotten, not from blood, nor from a will of flesh, nor from a will of man, but from God (John 1:9-13).**

All things came to be through Christ, including our own existence. Jesus offers the light of truth to every man, but not every man accepts it. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God who came to us in the world from heaven. For this world was created as a place where we can qualify to become sons of God to live in heaven with him.

We all belong to Jesus the Son of God because we came to be through him. Yet the world did not know him, and it did not accept him. And it still does not know him or accept him, not the authentic Jesus Christ. For they become offended when he is described to them.

Nevertheless, some of us do accept him. And he has given those who have faith in him the power to become children of God. We are children who were also begotten from God, although nothing like the way Jesus was. Those who believe in him are begotten from the Spirit of God, but not the way our earthly children are begotten. I explain much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

We are children of God here upon the earth. But in the eternity of heaven we will be sons of God, because there is no female gender there. As Jesus said, **“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as agents of God in heaven”** (Matthew 22:30). The female form is only for this world so that mankind can experience having offspring. We are offspring of God, and he is giving us the opportunity to see what it is like to have offspring, and to try to rear them to be righteous.

Beholding his inner glory

- **And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth** (John 1:14).

If Jesus had manifested himself to us with great earthly power and glory, then more of the world would have recognized him. For the world is enamored with earthly power and glory. However, Jesus came in weakness. He was born of a poor woman whose husband was a humble carpenter. And Jesus lived that same kind of life for his first thirty years.

The glory that Jesus manifested to us is spiritual. For his life and teachings show us the spirit of God, his inner being. The life and teachings of Christ reveal to us the magnificent beauty and grandeur of the inner nature of God, which is the most glorious part of him. Most people do not realize that God has a body for his Spirit, just as we have a body for our spirit. He is not spirit only. I also explain those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The life and teachings of the Son of God can now only be learned from the words of the New Testament. And those things enable us to behold his glory. The glory we can see is the inner glory of the Son of God, which is a reflection of the inner glory of God himself. And that glory is full of grace and truth. He is full of grace because God is love, as the apostle John said of him: **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16). And the Son of God is full of truth because God has endowed him with all wisdom and knowledge, and everything he says is true.

Grace and truth through Jesus Christ

- **John testified about him, and cried out, saying, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me came to be before me, because he was before me. And from his fullness we all received, even grace for grace. Because the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came to be through Jesus**

Christ. No man has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, being in the bosom of the Father, that man reported him (John 1:15-18).

Jesus came after John the immerser, but he came to be before John. Indeed, Jesus came to be before anything else because he was in heaven with the Father. And as the apostle John said, **“All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be”** (John 1:1-3).

Therefore, it was from his fullness that we have received all our blessings of God, including our very existence. And those blessings are from the grace of God. They are gifts from him because none of us could possibly provide them for ourselves. I once saw a movie where the leading actor spoke a prayer over a meal at a table with many other men. He mentioned how many things they did to provide that food for themselves. Then he concluded his prayer to God, by saying, “But we thank you anyway.”

In other words, that actor did not believe God had anything to do with providing their food. That foolish sinner forgot the most important part of getting food, which is the growth of the crops. And that growth is completely impossible for man to create; it is beyond our ability. God expects us to work with him, but he always does the hardest parts. Concerning that actor, regardless of his personal beliefs, when he portrayed that part and said those words, that made him guilty of blasphemy, demeaning God. Acting a part does not excuse anyone from what they do.

The apostle John contrasted the law of Moses with the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Jesus freed us from our bondage to legalism with God and gave us the law of liberty. I explain all about that difference in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*. Jesus also gave us truth, which enlightens our eyes in contrast to the darkness of error that has blinded the world to the greater reality of spiritual things.

Jesus also told us what God was like (spiritually), and he even portrayed him to us by his own life. He also revealed more clearly God’s will for us. He revealed to us our relationship with God, and how we can become his sons for eternity in heaven. Jesus was able to reveal more about God and his will for us than any other man because he had actually been in the bosom of the Father. For he is the only begotten Son of God, and he came to be before anything else.

John is asked who he is

- **And this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent forth priests and Levites from Jerusalem so that they might ask him, Who are thou? And he confessed, and did not deny, and confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What therefore, are thou Elijah? And he says, I am not. Are thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They said therefore to him, Who are thou, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do thou say about thyself? (John 1:19-22).**

John the immerser had attracted much attention from the Jews, and multitudes came to hear him in the wilderness. Therefore, the rulers of the Jews sent priests and Levites to

inquire who he was. For the Jews were anticipating some kind of deliverer from God. However, John denied being the Christ, the long awaited Messiah.

John also denied being Elijah, whom the prophet Malachi said that God would send to save them: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6).

Yet Jesus later told his disciples that John was that prophesied Elijah. Here is how he said it: **“And his disciples questioned him, saying, Why then do the scholars say that Elijah must first come? And having answered, Jesus said to them, Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things. But I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they knew him not, but did to him how many things they wanted. Likewise also the Son of man is going to suffer by them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the immerser”** (Matthew 17:10-13).

When John said he was not Elijah, he meant he was not the original Elijah of the Old Testament. When Jesus said that John was Elijah of the prophecy, he meant that John came in the spirit of Elijah and lived the same kind of rugged life. Why John did not explain those things is somewhat of a mystery. Jesus sometimes spoke in riddles to challenge our faith. Perhaps John did not explain himself so that Jesus would later explain him to us.

The prophet referred to by the Jews when they questioned John was probably the one prophesied by Moses. For Jehovah said to Moses, **“I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him”** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

John denied being any of those men. Therefore, the Jews demanded to know what he said about himself. They had been sent to investigate him, and obviously they did not want to return without an answer.

John was preparing the way of the Lord

- **He said, I am the voice of a man crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, just as the prophet Isaiah said** (John 1:23).

The answer that John gave them was a prophecy from Isaiah, which says, **“The voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places smooth. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it”** (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God sent John to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Christ. And that preparation included their repentance, which meant turning away from their sins. The valleys being filled and the mountains and hills being brought low symbolize the removal of the obstacles in the hearts of the people to receiving the good news of Christ. And the crooked things being straightened and the rough made smooth symbolize the hearts of the people

rejecting sin for righteousness, the righteousness of the kingdom of God that came through Christ.

Instead of going to population centers John preached in the wilderness. And he apparently relied upon word of mouth to attract listeners. He commanded the people to repent of their sins. And he also preached that the kingdom of God had approached (see Matthew 3:2).

They ask why he was immersing

- **And those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said to him, Why therefore do thou immerse if thou are not the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet?**
- **John answered them, saying, I immerse in water, but amidst you stands him whom ye know not. He is the man who comes after me, who has become before me, of whom I am not worthy that I might loosen the strap of his shoe. These things occurred in Bethany beyond the Jordan where John was immersing** (John 1:24-28).

Those who were sent from the Pharisees wanted to know why John was immersing the people. Remember, he had just told them he was a voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. He then told them there was a much greater man who was coming after him, and that man was even among them now.

John also humbly proclaimed that the man coming after him was much greater than he. So much greater, that John said he was not even worthy to loosen the strap of his shoe. The man John referred to was, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. But even John did not know who he was until he came to him.

The Jordan is the river about twenty miles east of Jerusalem. And it had sufficient water for John to immerse the people in. Nothing is known about that Bethany beyond the Jordan. The Bethany where Jesus occasionally lodged is very near Jerusalem (see for example, Matthew 21:17).

The Lamb of God

- **On the morrow John sees Jesus coming to him, and he says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (John 1:29).

Jesus is referred to as the lamb of God sixteen times in the New Testament, fourteen of which are in the book of Revelation. John is the first man in the Bible to use that expression for the Christ. Jesus is probably called the lamb of God for several reasons. He is called a lamb to contrast him from the predatory wolves of Satanism. He is called a lamb because he said he was **“meek and lowly in heart ...”** (Matthew 11:29). He is called the lamb because Paul said, **“For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”** (First Corinthians 5:7). And a sacrificial lamb was required for the Passover feast.

Regarding the Passover, remember, that feast was established to commemorate the protection the sons of Israel were given when all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were

destroyed by God (see Exodus 12). They were protected when they sprinkled the blood of a lamb on their door posts, because then the curse of God would “pass over” them.

In the same way the blood that Christ shed on the cross enabled him to become our Redeemer, which protects us from the eternal condemnation caused by our sins. Jesus took away the sin of the world by becoming our Redeemer, but only for those who become his disciples. The next passage explains how John first recognized Christ.

John announced the Son of God

- **This is he about whom I said, After me comes a man who has become before me, because he was before me. And I had not known him, but that he would be made known to Israel. Because of this I came immersing in water.**
- **And John testified, saying, I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him. But he who sent me to immerse in water, he said to me, Upon whomever thou will see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who immerses in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God (John 1:30-34).**

John the immerser said. **“I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. And I had not known him.”** That means John had not known Jesus until the Spirit descended like a dove out of heaven and remained on him.

However, in Matthew’s biography of Jesus, Matthew says that John recognized Jesus as the Christ before the Spirit descended like a dove upon him after his immersion: **“Then Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be immersed by him. But John was preventing him, saying, I have need to be immersed by thee, and thou come to me? But having answered, Jesus said to him, Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allows him. And when Jesus was immersed, he went up straightaway out of the water. And lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and coming upon him”** (Matthew 3:13-16).

The Holy Spirit must, therefore, have descended upon Jesus that way at some time earlier, before his immersion, to identify to John that Jesus was the Christ. (The apostle John did not record the story of the immersion of Jesus in his biography of him.)

Scoffers use such differences to deride the Bible, but we who believe are like scientists, men who search for natural laws. We search for explanations to help us understand what we believe and know is the word of God. Scoffers in science never find anything, nor do they ever learn the truth of God. As Solomon said, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding”** (Proverbs 14:6).

Regarding the appearance of the Spirit of God, it did not appear as a mighty power, but instead it appeared as a gentle dove. Why did God show himself so gentle during the time of Jesus? Part of the reason was to fulfill a prophecy: **“Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to**

be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, but he will bring forth justice in truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged till he has set justice in the earth. And in his name Gentiles will hope" (Isaiah 42:1-4). Matthew applied that prophecy to Jesus (see Matthew 12:15-21).

God has both a gently side and a fierce side. His gentle side is for the sheep of God that Jesus came to save. For Jesus said to the Jews who were rejecting him, **"But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand"** (John 10:26-28). I say much more about those things in my commentary.

John also said that Jesus the Son of God **"immerses in the Holy Spirit."** Immersion in the Holy Spirit probably means that special force would engulf them. For Paul said to his brothers in Corinth, **"Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?"** (First Corinthians 6:19). I say more about those things in my comments about Matthew 3:11.

Two of John's disciples follow Jesus

- **Again on the morrow John stood, and two of his disciples. And having looked upon Jesus walking, he says, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speaking, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus having turned, and having seen them following, says to them, What seek ye?**
- **And they said to him, Rabbi (which says, being interpreted, Teacher), where do thou dwell? He says to them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and remained with him that day. It was about the tenth hour** (John 1:35-39).

John testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God, the Christ. Why then did only two men follow Jesus? I believe the reason is because Jesus was so unassuming and ordinary looking. For the prophet Isaiah said of him, **"He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him"** (Isaiah 53:2). Nor did Jesus display himself like the lofty men of the world. Consequently, the people were not quick to leave a dynamic man like John to follow a meek and unknown man like Jesus.

Hence, Jesus welcomed the two men who followed and inquired of him, and he allowed them to remain with him that day. The tenth hour was 4 PM according to our time, because remember the Jews began their days at 6 AM. The scriptures say nothing about any other men being with Jesus until that time. Remember, before he began his ministry he was only a humble carpenter. And even after he began his ministry the brothers of Jesus (the other sons of Mary) did not believe in him, as John said farther in this book: **"For not even his brothers believed in him"** (John 7:5).

They accept him as the Messiah

- **Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard from John and who followed him. This man first finds his own brother Simon, and says to him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. And having seen him, Jesus said, Thou art Simon the son of Jonah. Thou wilt be called Cephas (which is interpreted, Peter) (John 1:40-42).**

Andrew was probably convinced that Jesus was the Messiah because of the testimony of John the immerser. For there is no record that Jesus performed any sign or miracle up to this time, at least not any that they would have known about.

There is some evidence that Jesus may have already revealed some of his powers to his mother Mary, for the record says, **"And having lacked wine the mother of Jesus says to him, They have no wine. And Jesus says to her, What is with me and with thee, woman? My hour is not yet here. His mother says to the helpers, Whatever he may say to you, do"** (John 2:3-5). That was when Jesus turned water into wine, which story is told a little farther on.

Jesus later provided those men with proof of himself with the great number of fishes they would catch (see Luke 5:6). The name Cephas is from an Aramaic word for rock. The name Peter is from the Greek word petros, which also means rock. Peter is the only man that Jesus gave another name to.

Jesus probably changed Simon's name to mean a rock because he knew what a strong and solid character he had. That quality of Peter helped him develop a very solid faith in Jesus. And it was upon such solid faith in him that Jesus said he would build his church. For the Pharisees were excommunicating from the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ (see John 9:22). Therefore, when Peter confessed his faith in him anyway, Jesus said to him, **"And I also say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"** (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus calls Philip to follow him

- **On the morrow he wanted to go forth into Galilee, and he finds Philip. And Jesus says to him, Follow me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.**
- **Philip finds Nathanael, and says to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets wrote: Jesus the son of Joseph of Nazareth. And Nathanael said to him, What good can be from Nazareth? Philip says to him, Come and see (John 1:43-46).**

Bethsaida was located near the northeast shore of the sea of Galilee. Why Jesus called Philip to follow him is not told. But since Philip was to become one of his apostles, Jesus probably chose him because he knew Philip was a righteous man and would be faithful to him. Philip was probably also a disciple of John the immerser. Nevertheless, Philip was also persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah, and he shared his faith with Nathanael.

When Nathanael heard that Jesus was from Nazareth he became skeptical of him. Very little is known about Nazareth except for being a city in Galilee where Jesus was raised as a child. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament. And it is mentioned in the New Testament primarily to identify Jesus; he was called Jesus of Nazareth, because Jesus was a common name in those days.

Why Nathaniel would speak that way about Nazareth is not known. Moreover, his words are somewhat ambiguous. He could have meant the population there was so bad that nothing good could come from the place. Or he could have simply meant Nazareth was such a poor and obscure place that nobody would expect anything good from there.

It is sufficient to simply say that Nazareth was not a place where great things were expected. And that is probably why God had his Son raised there. For remember, God chose poor people to be Jesus' parents. I speak much more about why Jesus was given no worldly advantages in the chapter "The Enemies of God" of my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Nathanael believes in him

- **Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and says about him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit. Nathanael says to him, How do thou know me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called thee, being under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered, and says to him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God. Thou art the king of Israel.**
- **Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, thou believest? Thou wilt see greater than these things. And he says to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, henceforth ye will see the heaven opened, and the agents of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John 1:47-51).**

Very little is known about Nathanael because he is only mentioned one other time in the Bible. Nevertheless, Jesus knew him well even before they met, because he judged Nathanael to be **"an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit."** Nathanael was not a vain man who enjoyed being flattered, and so he wanted to know how Jesus knew him. He no doubt wondered how Jesus could judge him that way, not ever having met him. Jesus was not flattering Nathanael, because he knew him well. The judgment Jesus gave about him was accurate.

Jesus' answer was simple but completely convincing, because Nathanael immediately confessed him to be the Son of God. Why those words convinced him so completely is not known, but I will offer a possibility.

I suspect Nathanael had been praying to God silently and alone under that fig tree somewhere in the countryside. I also suspect he was praying for God to send the Messiah soon to deliver Israel. Perhaps also if nobody knew he had gone to that fig tree then only God would have known anything about it. Therefore, Jesus' words about seeing him there would have meant that Jesus heard his prayer in a supernatural way. Nevertheless, that is

only a conjecture. Whatever was the reason, Nathanael was completely convinced by Jesus' response.

Seeing **"the heaven opened, and the agents of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"** was probably after Jesus was resurrected and departed the world, returning back to God. For the book of Acts says about that departure, **"And having said these things [to his disciples], as they were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him from their eyes"** (Acts 1:9). Although the book of Acts does not mention it, that was probably when the agents of God ascended and descended upon the Son of man.

In that passage Jesus called himself **"the Son of man."** The word Adam means man. Hence, any son of Adam (any descendant of his) is a son of man. The expression son of man is used 197 times in the Bible, 109 of which are in the Old Testament. It is used most of all in the book of Ezekiel: 97 times, all of which were when Jehovah and his agents were addressing the prophet Ezekiel. The record mentions one time an agent of heaven addressed the prophet Daniel that way.

The few other applications in the Old Testament of that expression refer to men in general. For example, the book of Jeremiah uses that expression four times; each one preceded with the word any, resulting in the expression "any son of man."

The words son of man were also used a few times in the Old Testament when referring to the Son of God. For example, it was used that way in this psalm: **"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou have ordained, what is man that thou remember him? And the son of man that thou succor him? For thou have made him but little lower than agents, and crowned him with glory and honor. Thou make him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou have put all things under his feet"** (Psalm 8:3-6).

The author of the book of Hebrews quoted that passage of the psalm when he was speaking about the Jesus Christ: **"But a certain man has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou remember him? Or a son of man, that thou help him? Thou made him a little something less than the agents. Thou crowned him with glory and honor. Thou subordinated all things under his feet. For in subordinating all things to him, he left nothing not subordinate to him. But now we do not yet see all things subordinated to him"** (Hebrews 2:6-8).

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man 83 times in the New Testament. The few other times the expression is used in the New Testament refer to men, such as "a son of man." Jesus even used it that way when he was referring to himself: **"For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man"** (John 5:26-27).

By calling himself the Son of man, Jesus emphasized the fact that even though he was the Son of God, he was a man. He became a man like us so that he could save our souls. And now he will always be a son of man, just as he will always be the Son of God. And by becoming our Redeemer he gave us the fabulous opportunity to become a brother to him in heaven as also sons of God

Jesus at a wedding

- **And the third day a wedding occurred in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the wedding. And having lacked wine the mother of Jesus says to him, They have no wine. And Jesus says to her, What is with me and with thee, woman? My hour is not yet here. His mother says to the helpers, Whatever he may say to you, do (John 2:1-5).**

The hosts of that wedding must have been poor. Otherwise they would have had plenty of surplus wine for the guests. Poor people must be very careful to budget what they have, and those hosts had underestimated how much wine they would need. And not having enough would have been a terrible embarrassment to them. Therefore, Mary, in her compassion for them, informed Jesus, which was a modest way to suggest he should help.

When Jesus was a child he was subordinate to Joseph and Mary, which is told in Luke's biography of him (see Luke 2:51). But Jesus was now thirty years old, and consequently he was no longer obligated to obey her. And Mary, being a humble and righteous woman, knew she could not command him to help.

Mary was a righteous and noble woman, and indeed worthy of much honor. Nevertheless, there has been much false teachings about her relationship and influence with Jesus. Jesus never elevated her the way many believers have. Indeed, the Roman Catholic church worships her as being almost equal with him. But Jesus never gave any indication that we should ever worship her.

Remember what happened when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers wanted to speak to him: **"But having answered, he said to the man who told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And having stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, he said, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in the heavens, he is my brother, and sister, and mother"** (Matthew 12:48-50).

Consider also the first words that Jesus said to Mary when she told him about the lack of wine: **"What is with me and with thee ... ?"** Those same words were later spoken to Jesus by an unclean spirit: **"And having cried out in a great voice, he said, What is with me and with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?"** (Mark 5:7).

That indicates those were words of criticism and disapproval. Jesus' response to Mary was one of criticism and disapproval. He criticized her for implying he should invoke his divine powers, and he disapproved her request. Jesus said the reason was because **"My hour is not yet here."** It was not yet the time for Jesus to reveal his divine powers.

Nevertheless, notice how Mary humbly accepted his criticism and disapproval. But she still prepared for his divine action by instructing the helpers to obey him. Mary knew that Jesus was a compassionate man, especially toward the poor and needy. She had faith in him and she was confident he would help.

There was another time when Jesus criticized and disapproved the request of a woman. That was the Canaanite who pleaded that he would cast out the demon from her daughter. Even though Jesus criticized and disapproved her request, he still healed her daughter

because of her humble and persistent faith in him (see Matthew 15:22-28). And that is a good lesson for us all.

Creating wine from water

- **Now there were six stone water pots laying there in accordance with the purification of the Jews, containing two or three measures each. Jesus says to them, Fill the water pots with water. And they filled them until over. And he says to them, Draw out now, and carry to the feast-ruler. And they carried.**
- **And when the feast-ruler tasted the water that became wine, and had not known from where it was (but the helpers who drew the water had known), the feast-ruler called the bridegroom, and says to him, Every man sets out the good wine first, and when they drank much, then the lesser. Thou have kept the good wine until now (John 2:6-10).**

Regarding the water pots, the Jews were very fastidious about washings. Remember this passage: **“For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, unless they wash their hands carefully, do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders. And coming from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they bathe. And there are many other things that they have taken in to retain: washings of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and beds”** (Mark 7:3-4). Therefore, it is believed those water pots at the wedding were very large, making much water available.

When the newly created wine was taken to the feast-ruler, he was very surprised at the high quality of it. The text says that the feast-ruler did not know the origin of the wine. Perhaps, however, Mary had assured the hosts that Jesus would provide for them, and so they may have known. But whether they knew at that time or not, the passage says that the helpers knew. And his disciples also knew, because the next passage in John says they believed in him.

There are many things that God has revealed to the humble and lowly that the high and mighty do not know. Remember these words of Jesus: **“In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, and said, I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight”** (Luke 10:21).

His disciples believed

- **This is the beginning of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and he manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and his brothers and his disciples. And they remained there not many days (John 2:11-12).**

Nobody knows where in Galilee that Cana was located, but knowledge of such things is trivial and irrelevant. The important thing is that he began his signs there to manifest his glory, helping his disciples to believe in him. The faith God wants in Jesus is not an irra-

tional, emotional, and intellectually blind faith. God wants our faith to be founded upon evidence and reason. Jesus performed his signs to give irrefutable evidence that God was with him. Indeed, he later said to the Jews, **"...the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me"** (John 5:36). For the devil and his disciples cannot do them.

Capernaum was a major town on the northwest coast of the sea of Galilee, and Jesus performed many signs there. But he later rebuked the people there for their lack of willingness to repent (see Matthew 11:23).

I need to say something about the Bible use of the words up and down relative to the location of a place. Sometimes the words refer to a location relative to the north. Sometimes the words refer to a location relative to elevation, such as going up or down a mountain. However, unlike their use today those words also refer to a location relative to its importance. For example, travelers were always said to go *up to Jerusalem* regardless of their location, while travelers were always said to go *down from Jerusalem* when they departed the city.

Cleansing the temple of merchants

- **And the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found sitting in the temple those who sell oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers. And having made a whip from cords, he drove all out from the temple both the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and turned over their tables.**
- **And he said to those who sell the doves, Take these things from here. Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it is written, Zeal for thy house will consume me** (John 2:13-17).

Those merchants were providing a service for those who needed animals for sacrifices, and also for the foreigners who needed to exchange their money to make such purchases. Here is the law of Moses about using money that way: **"Thou shalt surely tithe all the increase of thy seed; that which comes forth from the field year by year. And thou shalt eat before Jehovah thy God, in the place which he shall choose to cause his name to dwell there [that became Jerusalem], the tithe of thy grain, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herd and of thy flock, that thou may learn to fear Jehovah thy God always.**

"And if the way is too long for thee, so that thou are not able to carry it, because the place is too far from thee, which Jehovah thy God shall choose to set his name there when Jehovah thy God shall bless thee, then thou shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in thy hand, and shall go to the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose.

"And thou shall bestow the money for whatever thy soul desires, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever thy soul asks of thee. And thou shall eat there before Jehovah thy God, and thou shall rejoice, thou and thy

household. And the Levite who is within thy gates, thou shall not forsake him, for he has no portion nor inheritance with thee” (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

Worshippers were only allowed to make animal sacrifices at the altar in Jerusalem. But they were allowed to eat many of their sacrifices after the priests had taken their portion.

Nevertheless, those merchants should not have been in the temple area. Moreover, Matthew reported Jesus saying they made the temple a den of robbers (see Matthew 21:13). That means they overcharged those who needed the things they were marketing. The passage that John referred to is from Psalm 69:9, which says, **“For the zeal of thy house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach thee have fallen upon me.”**

Raising the temple in three days

- **The Jews therefore answered, and said to him, What sign do thou show us since thou do these things? Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, This temple was forty-six years being built, and will thou raise it up in three days?**
- **But that man spoke about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he spoke this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus said (John 2:18-22).**

The Jews were obviously very indignant that Jesus disturbed the merchants that way. The chief priests were no doubt getting paid by the merchants for being allowed to conduct their business in the temple. Therefore, they demanded a sign from Jesus to justify what he did.

Jesus gave them an answer that posed a problem for them because they could not test his claim about rebuilding the temple in three days. Of course, Jesus was referring to the temple of his body, and not the temple building where they worshiped. Rebuilding that temple in three days would have indeed been a mighty sign to them, because of how long it took men to build it. However, what Jesus actually did in three days was impossible for men to ever do, because it will always be impossible for mankind to restore a man from the dead, truly dead.

The disciples of Jesus knew that he was referring to the temple of his body, although they may not have understood it at the time. The Jews also knew later that he was referring to the temple of his body. That is revealed in this report about what they did after they had him crucified: **“Now on the morrow, which is after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was still alive, After three days I am raised.**

“Command therefore to secure the tomb until the third day, lest his disciples having come by night steal him away, and say to the people, He was raised from the dead. And the last error will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, Ye have security. Go, make it as secure as ye know how. And having gone, they made the tomb secure, with the security having sealed the stone” (Matthew 27:62-66).

The passage in John says that his disciples believed the scripture and the word that Jesus said. It has been suggested that the scripture referred to is this one: **“For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, nor wilt thou allow thy holy man to see corruption”** (Psalm 16:10). For Peter quoted that passage as referring to Jesus during his sermon on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2:27).

The **“word that Jesus said”** was no doubt the prophecy he made about being raised from the dead on the third day. He made that prophecy to them many times, but they never did understand until it actually happened.

Jesus knows all men

- **Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover during the feast, many believed in his name seeing his signs that he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men, and because he had no need that any man should testify about man, for he himself knew what was in man** (John 2:23-25).

Jesus did not trust himself to the multitude that followed him, because he knew how fickle men are. As an example of how fickle men are, consider this story about what happened to the apostle Paul:

“And a certain man was sitting in Lystra, disabled in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s belly, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul speaking, who, having gazed at him, and having seen that he has faith to be healed, said with a great voice, Stand correctly on thy feet. And he leaped up and walked.

“And the multitudes who saw what Paul did, lifted up their voice, speaking Lycaonian, The gods came down to us, having become like men. And they actually called Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the man who led the word. And the priest of Zeus, being in front of their city, after bringing oxen and garlands to the gates, wanted to sacrifice with the multitudes.

“But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard, having torn their garments, they rushed into the crowd, crying out and saying, Men, why are ye doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, proclaiming good news to you, to turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all the things in them, who in the generations that have passed allowed all the nations to go in their own ways, although he did not leave himself without evidence, doing good and giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts of food and gladness. And saying these things, they scarcely restrained the multitudes not to sacrifice to them.

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium. And having persuaded the crowds, and having stoned Paul, they dragged him out of the city, after presuming him to be dead” (Acts 14:8-19).

First the people of Lystra declared Paul and Barnabas to be gods. But not long afterward they stoned Paul to the point that they thought he was dead, and they dragged him out of the city. Within a short time they went from believing Paul was a god to trying to stone

him to death and dragging him out of the city. And what changed their mind about him was slander from Jews who came from two other towns. Those Jews probably slandered Paul's power to heal the same way they slandered Jesus' power to heal when he cast out demons, saying he did it by the power of the devil (see Matthew 12:24).

People are fickle and Jesus knows it. Therefore, he did not trust himself to them. God knows what is in every man. I say much more about how God knows about us in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*

We must be begotten from above

- **Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him.**
- **Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus says to him, How can a man be begotten, being old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's belly, and be born?**
- **Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is begotten from the flesh is flesh, and that which is begotten from the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said to thee, It is necessary for you to be begotten from above. The wind blows where it will, and thou hear the sound of it, but know not from where it comes, and where it goes. So is every man who is begotten from the Spirit (John 3:1-8).**

Nicodemus no doubt came to Jesus by night because the Jews condemned any man who believed in him. For John said farther in this book, **"Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"** (John 12:42-43).

Jesus understood the risk Nicodemus was taking by coming to him. That is probably why he did not criticize him for coming to him by night. Instead, Jesus responded to the faith of Nicodemus by telling him how to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus said the way is to be begotten from water and the Spirit. What Jesus meant by being begotten from water is the ceremony of immersion for the remission of sins. As Paul said, **"Or are ye ignorant that as many as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into his death? We were buried therefore with him through the immersion into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life"** (Romans 6:3-4).

Being immersed in water symbolizes the burial of our old self, which was corrupted by sin. And being raised from the water symbolizes being begotten again; begotten from the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. And that is an invisible process, like the blowing of the

wind. God somehow renews our spirit and makes it pure and innocent again like a new-born babe.

Paul also said we become a new creation: **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”** (Second Corinthians 5:17). We become sons of God for eternity, because Paul also said, **“For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:26).

We are all born with a corrupted body of flesh but with a pure and innocent spirit. But whenever we sin we defile and corrupt our spirit, and we lose our sonship with God. However, by being begotten from water and Spirit, our spirit can be renewed pure and innocent again for us to become sons of God. And our spirit remains pure and innocent as long as we remain faithful to Christ. For Paul quoted David, who said, **“Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is a man to whom the Lord does, no, not impute sin”** (Romans 4:7-8).

When we are begotten of water and Spirit then God no longer imputes sin against us. Certainly we can still offend him from time to time. And he will chasten us for it, because the author of Hebrews said, **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”** (Hebrews 12:6-7).

When we become his sons through Christ, then God does not reckon our offenses to be sins. For sin brings condemnation, and we can never be condemned again as long as we remain in Christ. As Paul said, **“Who will accuse against the chosen of God? God is he who makes righteous. Who is he who will condemn? It is Christ who died, but more, who also was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also appeals for us”** (Romans 8:33-34).

Nevertheless remember, our salvation is never complete until this life is over. It only becomes complete when we remain faithful to the end. Even the apostle Paul said he could still be lost: **“Know ye not that those who run in an arena, indeed all run, but one receives the prize? So run that ye may seize it. And every man who strives for mastery exercises self-control in all things. Indeed therefore those men do it so that they might obtain a perishable crown, but we an imperishable.”**

“I therefore run this way, not as aimlessly. I fight this way, not as flaying air. But I give my body a black eye and subdue it, lest somehow having preached to others, I myself might become disqualified” (First Corinthians 9:24-27).

I speak much more about all those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Nicodemus could not believe

- **Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things happen? Jesus answered and said to him, Thou art the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to thee, we speak that which we know, and testify of what we have seen, and ye do not accept our testimony** (John 3:9-11).

The faith of Nicodemus was fragile. That is no doubt why Jesus did not rebuke him for coming by night. Nevertheless, Jesus did rebuke Nicodemus (1) for not understanding the things he told him, and (2) for not accepting the testimony. Nicodemus' lack of understanding meant he could not believe the things that Jesus said were possible. Understanding and belief often go together. The world does not believe the things about God and the spiritual world that are taught in the Bible because they do not understand them. Nevertheless, what God has given is sufficient for us to believe in him, even if we cannot understand everything.

When Jesus said **“we speak that which we know, and testify of what we have seen”** he was referring to both himself and to God the Father. For God was testifying with Jesus by the mighty works that he was doing. Nicodemus even said he believed that Jesus was from God because of those works: **“Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him.”**

When Jesus said to Nicodemus **“ye do not accept our testimony,”** he used the word ye, which is plural. Jesus must, therefore, have been referring both to Nicodemus and to all men like him who doubted his words. For Nicodemus did not accept the testimony that Jesus spoke to him about being begotten again. He did not accept the testimony of God and Christ because he could not understand how those things were possible.

Jesus told Nicodemus that he (and God) spoke to him about things that he (and God) knew, not things that he believed. And Jesus said he testified about things that he (and God) had seen, not things he had merely heard about. The words of Jesus were based upon knowledge and eye-witnessing. In other words, his testimony was of the highest and most reliable quality.

Dear reader, do not lose your faith just because you cannot understand everything. The testimony that God has given us in the Bible is sufficient for us to believe in him. We will never be able to understand everything about things spiritual. Indeed, mankind will never be able to understand everything about our world and things material. Trust God based upon what we do know about him from the testimony he has given us. That testimony is sufficient for our soul's salvation.

Earthly things and heavenly things

If I told you earthly things, and ye do not believe, how will ye believe if I should tell you heavenly things? (John 3:12).

When Jesus mentioned the heavenly things, he was alluding to the much greater wonders of the heavenly world; things that are even more difficult to understand, because they are so much more amazing.

Consider what people of ancient times would have thought if they were told about all the marvelous wonders of the modern world. Would they have been like Nicodemus, and doubted such things were possible? I suspect most of them would have laughed and scoffed, saying that such things could not possibly happen. And things in heaven are incomprehensibly more amazing.

The earthly things that Jesus spoke about in that passage involve the invisible process of our being begotten from water and the Spirit. Although it is a spiritual process, neverthe-

less it is an earthly thing. It is earthly because it happens in this world. There are many things in our world that are invisible to us, such as the force of gravity, the forces of magnetism, and radio waves. And the invisible spiritual things are just as real.

The Son of man who is in heaven

- **And no man has ascended into heaven, except he who came down out of heaven: the Son of man who is in heaven** (John 3:13).

The record of the Old Testament tells how the prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven: **“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which divided them both apart. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”** (Second Kings 2:11).

However, the word “heaven” can mean the sky or the spiritual world of God. Elijah was taken up into the sky. Where he went is never told. However, it could not have been the heaven that Jesus came from, because Jesus said no man had ascended into heaven except himself, he who came down out of heaven.

Jesus came down out of heaven in his Spirit when he entered into the womb of Mary to be born as a man of flesh. The only record we have about when he ascended into heaven is after his resurrection and departure from the world. As Mark said, **“Therefore indeed, the Lord, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God”** (Mark 16:19).

However, in that passage from John’s biography of him Jesus spoke of his ascending into heaven before that time. Ascending that way must have happened earlier in his life. Perhaps he ascended that way in order to give him special knowledge he needed for his mission here. Of course, if he ascended into heaven that way, then he had to descend back to complete his work here. How often he ascended and descended that way is not told.

The only other explanation I can think of is that when Jesus spoke of his ascending into heaven he was using those words in what could be called the historical future. Here is an example of that: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I wanted to gather thy children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, ye will, no, not see me henceforth, until ye say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”** (Matthew 23:37-39).

Notice how Jesus said about Jerusalem, **“Behold, your house is left to you desolate.”** It would be forty years before Jerusalem would be destroyed. Yet Jesus spoke of it as already made desolate. Therefore, in that passage from John’s biography of him, Jesus may have been referring to his final departure into heaven, even though he used words about it in the past tense, as if it had already happened.

The Bible commonly uses words in what is called the historical present. Which means it sometimes speaks of things in the present tense that were actually done in the past. Here is one example: **“And he comes to the disciples, and finds them sleeping”** (Matthew 26:40).

Regarding Elijah, he was probably taken to the paradise that Jesus mentioned when he said to one of the men who were being crucified with him, **“Truly I say to thee, today thou wilt be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:43). Jesus said that to him because the man believed in him and defended him. That paradise must be some kind of place that is intermediary between our material world and the spiritual world of heaven. Other passages in the Bible that tell about men being taken to heaven must refer to either that intermediary place, or some other unknown place beyond this world.

Regarding others, the spirit of the apostle John was taken to heaven in his great vision (see Revelation 4:1-2). But that was long after Jesus ascended back to heaven. And Paul mentions a man who was taken to the third heaven (see Second Corinthians 12:2). But that was no doubt also long after Jesus ascended back to heaven. There is much mystery about those things.

Regarding the last part of what Jesus said in that passage from John’s biography of him, those who believe in the trinity theory use those words to justify their belief that Jesus is God the Father himself. They use them because Jesus said, **“... the Son of man who is in heaven.”** Thus claiming that Jesus was both on the earth and in heaven at the same time.

However, there is a better explanation than the irrational trinity theory. Jesus was in heaven while he was on the earth because his glorious spiritual body was still there. Jesus left his glorious spiritual body in heaven to come down out of heaven in his spirit to enter a body of flesh. Hence, he could speak of himself as being in both places at the same time.

Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of man, because he was begotten both of God and of man. Jesus was begotten of man through being born of Mary. He was not conceived by a man, but he was begotten by a human, a descendant of the man Adam. Being begotten can simply mean being born. And that is how Jesus is the Son of man: he was born as a man, a biological descendant of Adam through Mary.

Of course, when Jesus used the words **“... the Son of man who is in heaven,”** he could also have been expressing them in the historical present. Which would mean he was actually saying the Son of man was in heaven. And there are several other times Jesus spoke of having been in heaven with the Father before he was born in the world. Nevertheless, I prefer the explanation that says his glorious body was in heaven while he (his Spirit) was in his temporary body of flesh.

Being lifted up for our salvation

- **And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but may have eternal life** (John 3:14-15).

The serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness is told in this story: **“And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, and there is no water, and our soul loathes this light bread. And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many people of Israel died.**

“And the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, because we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee. Pray to Jehovah, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said to Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard. And it shall come to pass, that everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Numbers 21:5-8).

In the same way, everyone who is condemned because of his sins (and that includes all of us), when he looks to Jesus and the great sacrifice he made for us, will live. God told Moses to set up a fiery serpent on a standard because the fiery serpents were causing the death of people.

And in the same way, God allowed his Son Jesus Christ to be lifted up on a cross as a guilty man (although falsely so), because our guilt before God is causing our (spiritual) deaths. The fiery serpent that Moses lifted up was made of brass (see Second Kings 18:4), and was itself not guilty. In the same way, Christ himself was not guilty even though he was crucified as a criminal, because he was falsely condemned.

It was absolutely necessary for the Son of God to come into this world, live as a man of flesh, be tempted, and suffer persecution and be crucified. Jesus, by successfully living a sinless life, and having endured every trial and temptation, Jesus proved his moral and spiritual superiority over all others. And having fully obeyed God’s every command, even to the point of suffering innocently on the cross, God rewarded him with the right to redeem from eternal condemnation (the second death) all who belong to him.

Thus, everyone who looks to Jesus for salvation from his sins will be redeemed from condemnation. Jesus redeems all who belong to him, because he bought us with the reward that God gave him for his perfect obedience. As Paul said, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is of God”** (First Corinthians 6:19-20), and, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 6:23).

For God so loved the world

- **For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not that he might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned** (John 3:16-17).

That is one of the most beautiful and oft quoted of the passages in the Bible. God sent his only begotten Son into the world, and entrusted him with the mission to redeem our souls. He commanded his beloved Son to live a life of suffering in the world because he loves us. For if Jesus had not earned the right to redeem us, then we would have suffered the same final punishment as the devil and his disciples.

That would have happened because God is a God of justice. Indeed, justice is the foundation of his throne. As the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). Righteousness and justice justify his supreme

authority. And whoever sins is condemned to death regardless of who does it. God is just in all of his judgments, and he is never partial (see Romans 2:11), not even to his own Son.

That is why Satan continually accused us to God before Christ lived his successful life in the world. The apostle John describes what happened to the devil after Jesus ascended back to heaven: **“And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought. And he did not prevail, nor was a place found for him any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him.”**

“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death. Rejoice because of this, O heavens, and ye who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time” (Revelation 12:7-12).

That is why it was necessary for the Son of God to come into this world of trials and temptations to prove his moral and spiritual superiority over all others (except for the Father himself), and earn the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him.

When the passage says, **“He who believes in him is not condemned,”** that means having an obedient faith in him. For when James was teaching about the necessity of having good works, he said, **“Thou believe that there is one God, thou do well. The demons also believe, and shudder”** (James 2:19).

Not believing the Son of God

- **He who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God** (John 3:18).

Because of the perfect life of Jesus, the devil and his disciples now have no excuse for their sins. Now only men who commit themselves to Jesus Christ will have eternal life and will not perish in the fires of hell. Any man who does not commit himself to Christ is condemned regardless of how else he may live. He may live as righteously as the best men have lived, but he will still be condemned if he rejects Christ, because no man can live a sinless life. However, I must say that if a man is righteous and one of Christ's sheep he will eventually believe in him.

Our righteousness alone will not save us, because a single sin condemns a man to death, just as it did in the beginning with Adam. Only Jesus Christ was able to live perfectly without sin. Only he was able because he is the only begotten Son of God. His sinless life here proved his moral and spiritual superiority. I say much more about those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Loving light or darkness

- **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. For every man who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21).**

Every sinful man hates truth and loves deceit. They hate truth because they love to sin. It is no coincidence that this most guilty generation of Americans continually demands more rights to privacy. Everybody has a right to some privacy. But this evil-loving generation has greatly enlarged their demands for privacy, which is in fact a demand for secrecy. They demand much secrecy so they can conceal their sins.

The legitimate need for privacy has always been to protect against evil, and not to conceal it. Those who love to sin demand increased rights of privacy because they do not want their evil to be exposed. They hate light and love darkness. But we who love truth and righteousness love the light so that our good deeds can be known. We want everybody to see that our works in obedience to God are good and right and just.

Immersing in water

- **After these things Jesus and his disciples came into the Judean country. And he remained there with them and immersed. And John also was immersing in Aenon near Salim because there was much water there. And they came and were immersed (John 3:22-23).**

That passage is further evidence that BAPTISMA (transliterated baptism) is truly immersion in water. For John was performing that ritual in Aenon **“because there was much water there.”** And immersion indeed requires much water, while sprinkling and pouring do not. Sprinkling and pouring can never substitute for the command to be immersed in water for the remission of our sins.

The two immersions in water

- **For John was not yet cast into prison. Therefore a debate developed from John’s disciples with the Jews about purification. And they came to John, and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with thee beyond the Jordan, about whom thou have testified, behold, this man immerses, and all men come to him.**
- **John answered and said, A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven. Ye yourselves testify that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent ahead of that man.**

- **He who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This therefore my joy is fulfilled. It is necessary for that man to increase, but me to decrease (John 3:24-30).**

John was later cast into prison by king Herod, because John rebuked Herod for having married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (see Mark 6:17).

Regarding purification, it is not clear what was meant by that debate about it. John's immersion of the people was for repentance (see Matthew 3:11), and repentance involves purification. Hence, the debate must have been about the immersions of John and of Jesus. As the above passage says, there was a time when both John and Jesus were immersing and making disciples. It was a transition time when the ministry of John was decreasing, but the ministry of Jesus was increasing.

That changeover was not sudden. Therefore, John reminded them that Jesus must increase but he must decrease. Remember, the mission of John was to prepare the people for the coming Christ. And John himself testified that Jesus was the Christ.

John used an illustration to emphasize how Christ must increase but he must decrease. In his illustration, John referred to Christ as the bridegroom and himself as the friend of the bridegroom. And just as the friend rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice, so also John rejoiced with joy because of the voice of Christ. And he said that made his joy fulfilled. It made his joy fulfilled because it fulfilled his mission of preparing the way for the Christ.

Regarding the immersion of John, it was never considered a satisfactory substitute for the immersion of Christ. As evidence of that, consider this record from the book of Acts: **"And it came to pass while Apollos was at Corinth, for Paul, having passed through the upper regions, to come to Ephesus. And having found some disciples, he said to them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said to him, But we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit.**

"And he said to them, Into what then were ye immersed? And they said, Into John's immersion. And Paul said, John indeed immersed an immersion of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus, the Christ. And when they heard this, they were immersed in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:1-5).

John's reply to his disciples included these words: **"A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven."** When Paul was rebuking the disciples at Corinth for making divisions within themselves based upon personalities, among the things he said, was, **"Now these things, brothers, I applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us ye might learn not to think above that which is written, so that ye may not be puffed up, one over the one against the other. For who makes thee different? And what have thou that thou did not receive? And also if thou received it, why do thou boast as not having received it?" (First Corinthians 4:5-7).**

Everything that we have comes from God. And to express the meaning of what John the immerser said about receiving, no man can receive anything unless it is given to him from

God. I explain much more about God and our blessings from him in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

From above or from the earth

- **He who comes from above is above all things. He who is of the earth is of the earth, and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all things** (John 3:31).

As with much of the Bible, those words are very concise, but they contain many important truths. Twice in that passage John said that he who comes from above (from heaven) is above all things: once before and once after saying he who was of the earth is of the earth, and speaks of the earth. Every man is of the earth. It is here on the earth that we are born with bodies of flesh inherited from Adam, and it is here on the earth that we inherit our divine spirits from Adam. In both body and spirit we are of the earth.

However, Jesus is not of the earth. He was begotten of God in heaven itself. Therefore, Jesus truly came from above. He came in his spirit, because his spirit is his true self, just as our spirit is our true self. Jesus originated in heaven, while we originate on the earth. We speak of the things of the earth, but Jesus spoke of heaven because he was begotten there, even before the world began. We can only think of a few of the things of heaven from what the word of God teaches us about it.

Speaking about how Christ must reign above all things until the end of the world, Paul said, **“For as by Adam all die, so also by Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order. Christ the first fruit, then those of Christ at his coming. Afterwards the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he will abolish all rule, and all authority and power.**

“For he must reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy abolished is death. For he subordinated all things under his feet. But when he says that all things have been subordinated, it is clear that he who subordinated all things under him, is excepted. And when all things are made subordinate to him, then the Son himself will also be made subordinate to him who subordinated all things to him, so that God may be all in all” (First Corinthians 15:22-28).

No man receives his testimony

- **And what he has seen and heard, of this he testifies, and no man receives his testimony** (John 3:32).

Although John said that no man receives his testimony, he then said (in the next passage) that he who has received his testimony has set a seal that God is true. There are many times when the Bible says no man or all men in a non-absolute sense. No man sometimes means very few men, and all men sometimes means the great majority of them. Let not that kind of use of the word all confuse you. Nor let scoffers use such things to weaken your faith in the word of God.

What John said does not mean literally all men, because some of us have received his testimony. That is clearly told in what John said next. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the

world does not receive his testimony. They do not receive it in the sense of not accepting it and believing it.

Receiving his testimony

- **He who has received his testimony has set a seal that God is true** (John 3:33).

What John means by God being true is that God is genuine and authentic, faithful and reliable, as well as factual. A seal is a mark of authenticity, an indication that something is genuine.

John says that we who receive the testimony of Jesus Christ provide proof (set a seal) that God is genuine and authentic, faithful and reliable. We prove God that way by believing and obeying Jesus the Son of God. Our very lives as faithful disciples of Christ are proof enough that God is true. For we are guided by his Spirit of love and productive creativity. We are living proof that the word of God is true. For the good news of Christ has been tested through us and proven true.

What other source of knowledge and wisdom has been such a blessing to mankind? Wherever the testimony of Jesus, his good news of our salvation, has been believed and applied by a population of people, their society prospers and becomes exalted. Belief in the word of the God caused Europe and America to rise high in the world. And ever since faith in the word of God has been abandoned by them, Europe and America have been declining. And it grieves my soul.

Speaking the sayings of God

- **For he whom God sent speaks the sayings of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand** (John 3:34-35).

When John said that the Son of God, who was sent by God, speaks the sayings of God, that means the record we have of his teachings can be accepted as the word of God. When he said that God does not give the Spirit by measure, that means God endowed his Son with the full power of the Holy Spirit. Other men that were given powers of the Holy Spirit were always limited in those powers.

God the Father loves his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. God loves the Son, and has given him all things because the Son always obeys him. God's love is only unconditional for innocent souls. If God loves the world unconditionally, then why did he destroy the antediluvian population with a world-wide flood? And why is he going to condemn most of mankind to the eternal fires of hell? The reason is because his love is not unconditional, and ours should not be either. That perverse idea of unconditional love was invented by an atheist psychologist who was promoting the false ideology of humanism. He was promoting humanism because he would not believe in God.

When the passage says that God has given all things into his hand, that means Jesus has the ultimate power and authority over all things, except for God the Father. God has given all things into his hand because he loves the Son. And he loves the Son because the Son

loves him and always obeys him. And God will love us if we love and obey him and his Son.

Having or not having eternal life

- **He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him** (John 3:36).

These last words of John the immerser express the wonderful promise from God of eternal life to those who believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. He who disobeys the Son will not see life but will suffer the wrath of God. He will suffer the wrath of God because of his rebellion against him. Notice how believing and obeying always go together.

Having life and seeing it, means experiencing it, experiencing eternal life. There is a huge difference between being alive, in the sense of existing, and having eternal life. Eternal life means sharing with God an eternal existence in a dynamic and creative way. It means living like him as his sons for eternity in the perfect world of heaven.

Not seeing life means not having that kind of existence. It means suffering the wrath of God for eternity. Every offspring of God exists forever; they never cease existing; they never cease having consciousness with its thoughts and feelings. However, only those who believe in and obey his Son Jesus Christ will have divine life, to experience all the glories and beauties of eternal life.

Hence, there is a great difference between simply being alive and having eternal life. Souls in hell remain alive forever, but they do not and will not ever experience the joys and wonders of eternal life.

John the immerser, Jesus, and the Pharisees

- **When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and immersing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not immerse, but his disciples), he left Judea, and departed into Galilee** (John 4:1).

The Pharisees had the reputation of being the most religious men of the Jews. And they apparently considered themselves the spiritual watchmen of the people. Consequently, they observed what John was doing and also what Jesus was doing. How that is relevant to Jesus departing Judea for Galilee is not clear. Perhaps it means persecution there against Jesus was increasing because Jesus was making more disciples.

There is no record that the Pharisees actively persecuted John the way they did Jesus. It was Herod who had John arrested and eventually killed him. I suspect the Pharisees did not persecute John so much because John was not active in traveling among the people. He waited for them to come to him. In contrast, Jesus went to the people. That was one reason he was making and immersing more disciples. And that was threatening to the Pharisees, because Jesus also openly rebuked them.

The reason Jesus did not himself immerse anyone was probably to prevent foolish claims that immersion by him was somehow superior to immersion by his disciples.

Immersion in water for the remission of sins was never commanded while Jesus was upon the earth. People did it as an outward show of their repentance. However, immersion in water for the remission of sins is now commanded. For Jesus said to his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, **“Having gone into all the world, preach ye the good news to the whole creation. He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:15-16).

Peter preached that command when the church was established on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. For when Peter convinced the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, they asked him, **“Men, brothers, what will we do?”** Peter answered, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38).

Remission of sins was not possible until Jesus completed his life of perfect obedience to God, because that was the only way he could redeem us from our sins. Before the death of Christ there could be no remission of sins. Hence, immersion in water for the remission of sins was not commanded before then. When Jesus forgave people before his resurrection, that forgiveness was contingent upon his earning the right to become our Redeemer.

Those who had been immersed by John needed to be immersed again. Remember the example of the disciples who had only been immersed in the name of John. When they were discovered, they were immersed again in the name of Jesus Christ (see Acts 19:1-5).

Although the Bible gives no example of it, I suspect even those who had been immersed by the disciples of Jesus needed to be immersed again. However, if they had been immersed in the name of Christ, then they may not have needed to be immersed again. That was a time of transition, and the remission of their sins may have been retroactive after Jesus ascended into heaven. For men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were certainly not immersed for the remission of their sins. Remission was retroactive for them and for every righteous soul who lived before Christ.

Nevertheless, God is the judge of such things, and we need not be concerned about whether that was required of them or not. Our concern is to obey that command, because it is absolutely necessary now.

Speaking with a Samaritan woman

- **And it was necessary for him to pass through Samaria. So he comes to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the place that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. And Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore being wearied from the journey, thus was sitting on the well. It was about the sixth hour** (John 4:2-6).

Samaria was between Judea and Galilee, which was why Jesus was there. Remember, the sixth hour by their time was noon by our time. Also remember, travel on land in those times was almost always either on foot or by donkey. And the record indicates that Jesus almost always traveled on foot. Therefore, if he had been traveling since early morning it was natural for him to be weary by that time.

The land of Israel was a fairly dry one. Therefore, many wells were needed. And cross country roads were probably laid out to include wells on the way. That particular well must have been very ancient, having been dug by Jacob (the grandson of Abraham) about two thousand years before.

Jews versus Samaritans

- **A woman of Samaria comes to draw water. Jesus says to her, Give me to drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city so that they might buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore says to him, How do thou, being Jewish, ask to drink from me, being a Samaritan woman, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans? (John 4:7-9).**

The name Jew is short for Judean, a citizen of the tribe of Judah. The word Jew was rarely used in the Old Testament before all the sons of Israel (the Hebrew people) had been defeated and their remnant was scattered throughout foreign countries. Only the Judeans retained their racial purity, and they were called Jews.

Eventually the small remnant that survived the conquest was able to return and reoccupy their tribal land. The book of John uses the words Jew and Jews sixty-eight times, which is over four times more than the other three biographies of Jesus combined.

The Samaritans were half-breed Hebrews. Moses had commanded the sons of Israel against marrying women of the condemned Gentile nations. After the Assyrian conquest and dispersion of the citizens of the northern tribes of Israel, the surviving Hebrews of those tribes married Gentile women. Most of the land of the northern tribes was called Samaria. Hence, those half-breed offspring were called Samaritans by the Jews. That was why they were not accepted by the Jews, and were held in contempt by them.

Here is what the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says about them:

The Samaritans (Hebrew: שומרונים Shomronim, Arabic: السامريون as-Sāmariyyūn) are an ethnoreligious group of the Levant. Religiously the Samaritans are adherents of Samaritanism, an Abrahamic religion closely related to Judaism. Based on the Samaritan Torah, Samaritans claim their worship is the true religion of the ancient Israelites prior to the Babylonian Exile, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel, as opposed to Judaism, which they assert is a related but altered and amended religion, brought back by those returning from exile.

Ancestrally, Samaritans claim descent from a group of Israelite inhabitants from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the two sons of Joseph) as well as some descendants from the priestly tribe of Levi who have connections to ancient Samaria from the period of their entry into the land of Canaan, while some suggest that it was from the beginning of the Babylonian Exile up to the Samaritan Kingdom of Baba Rabba. The Samaritans, however, derive their name not from this geographical designation, but rather from the Hebrew term שָׁמְרִים, “Keepers [of the Law]”.

In the Talmud, a central post-Second Temple religious text of Judaism, Samaritan claim of ancestral origin was disputed, and in those texts they are called Cutheans (Hebrew: כּוּתִּים, Kuthim), referring to the ancient city of Cuthah (Kutha), geographi-

cally located in what is today Iraq. In the Biblical account, however, Cuthah was just one of several cities from which people were brought to Samaria, and the Samaritans were later called “Cutheans” to spite them, with the added assertion that the men of Kuth made Nergal their god. Modern genetics has suggested some truth to both the claims of the Samaritans and the mainstream Jewish accounts in the Talmud.

You can read more about the Samaritans and their history on the internet.

Living water

- **Jesus answered and said to her, If thou had known the gift of God, and who it is who says to thee, Give me to drink, thou would have asked him, and he would have given thee living water.**
- **The woman says to him, Sir, thou have not even a container, and the well is deep. From where then have thou the living water? Are thou greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his livestock? (John 4:10-12).**

The living water that Jesus spoke about is the Holy Spirit, which God gives to every soul who accepts his Son Jesus Christ. That spirit comes directly from God himself to reside within us, and having that spirit guarantees our eternal life. However, it does not give us supernatural powers. Those powers were special gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given only to some members of the early church before the New Testament was written. I speak much more about these things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Notice how that Samaritan woman called Jacob their father. The Samaritans have always considered themselves descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Jews reject them because they had corrupted themselves by intermarrying with the forbidden Gentiles.

Water springing up to eternal life

- **Jesus answered and said to her, Every man who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will, no, not thirst into the age. But the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (John 4:13-14).**

Jesus used the analogy of living water to symbolize the Holy Spirit. And in the above passage Jesus continued with that analogy. As water sustains our lives, so having the Holy Spirit within us gives us life. And being living water, it gives us eternal life.

A spirit is energy, and part of the energy of the Holy Spirit is knowledge in our minds about the good news of salvation. For during the last supper Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (see John 14:17 and 16:13). And it is only by accepting the knowledge of the good news of Christ in the heart of our minds, and obeying it that we become destined for eternal life.

No man can become a disciple of Christ without first hearing about him, and then believing and obeying him. And the energizing knowledge we have from the message of his good news will elevate us spiritually and lead us ever closer to our heavenly Father.

Souls who never have the opportunity to learn about Christ will be judged by their own consciences. As Paul said, **“For the hearers of the law are not righteous with God, but the doers of the law will be made righteous. For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news”** (Romans 2:13-16).

She had five husbands

- **The woman says to him, Give me this water, sir, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw out. Jesus says to her, Go, call thy husband, and come here. The woman answered and said to him, I have no husband. Jesus says to her, Thou said correctly, I have no husband. For thou have had five husbands, and he whom thou now have is not thy husband. This thou have said true** (John 4:15-18).

What Jesus said clearly shows that God does not recognize what men call common-law marriage. There are no commands anywhere in the Bible about what kind of marriage ceremony is required. Nevertheless, to be a genuine marriage it must be announced in some way to the community and recognized by them. Simply living together or cohabiting is a sinful relationship that is fornication in the sight of God. And any offspring that result from it are bastards in his sight.

That passage also indicates she was not a young woman. She was probably middle-age. A young woman would hardly have already had five husbands, and what she was doing at the well would have been difficult for an elderly woman.

Having multiple husbands (serially) is very common in the entertainment world, because it is so morally corrupt. And as a consequence their children usually end up living sinful degenerate lives.

Where to worship

- **The woman says to him, Sir, I perceive that thou are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship.**
- **Jesus says to her, Woman, believe me, that the hour is coming when neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem will ye worship the Father. Ye worship what ye do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews** (John 4:19-22).

The woman perceived Jesus to be a prophet because he told her things he could not have otherwise known. Indeed, the woman later said to the citizens of her city, **“Come, see a man who told me all, as many things as I did. Is not this the Christ?”** (John 4:29). From what the woman said about him, Jesus must have told her other things about her life.

For John later recorded these words about him: **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly”** (John 21:25).

Regarding where to worship, after king Solomon died Jeroboam was made king of the northern tribes of Israel because they revolted from Solomon’s son king Rehoboam and his tribe of Judah. After the separation Jeroboam then changed their place of worship from Jerusalem, and he set up idols for the people to worship instead of worshipping Jehovah. Jeroboam did that because he feared the people would return to Rehoboam if they still went to worship Jehovah at the temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. You can read about that in First Kings 12.

When Jeroboam turned the hearts of the people of the northern tribes of Israel away from Jehovah that way, they never did return to God. Fourteen times in the Old Testament it tells how the people **“did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin.”** The people there eventually developed into the Samaritans and created a hybrid religion. And in the same way, after the temple was destroyed by the Romans the Jews created a hybrid religion called Judaism.

Jesus said to the woman that the Samaritans worshiped in ignorance, **“because salvation is from the Jews.”** The Jews never departed completely from worshipping Jehovah. Although there were many times they turned away from him, they always eventually returned. The temple was in Judea, and the Jews were more faithful to the laws of Moses, although very incompletely.

At the time of Christ the Jews were the custodians of the word of God, which then only consisted of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was given through the Hebrews, the race of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Jews were the descendants of that race. And being the custodians of the word of God, knowledge about God and his will for us was from them. Hence, salvation was from the Jews.

Moreover, Jesus who came to redeem us was a Jew. And his good news of our salvation is recorded in the New Testament, all of which was written by Jews. Hence, salvation still came from the Jews—those who were faithful to Christ. However, salvation no longer comes from Jews, because they rejected the Son of God.

Worship in spirit and truth

- **But an hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for also the Father seeks such kind who worship him. God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth** (John 4:23-24).

Forty years after Jesus began his ministry the Roman army came and destroyed Jerusalem. They also destroyed the temple, and it has never been rebuilt. Ever since that time it has been impossible for anyone to worship God the way Moses commanded the sons of Israel. The temple was build to house the ark of the covenant (God’s covenant with the Israelites). But the ark and its physical contents no longer exist, although the words of the covenant still do. That old covenant (with all the laws of Moses) was abolished when the church was established. God now has a new covenant for those who believe in Christ.

With the establishment of the kingdom of God, which on the earth is the church, the place of worship is now wherever his disciples gather in his name. Remember what Jesus said: **“The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! For behold, the kingdom of God is inside of you”** (Luke 17:20-21), and, **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”** (Matthew 18:20).

The true worshipers of God, the disciples of Christ, worship him in spirit. That means they do not simply perform some rituals; they worship him with their heart. And they also worship in truth. That means they worship in accordance with his will, which is revealed to us in the Holy Bible. We do not worship based upon human traditions and human ideas. We worship as Christ and his disciples have taught us in the scriptures. We worship him in spirit and in truth.

Notice how Jesus said that God is a Spirit. However, that does not mean he is a Spirit only. For there is evidence in the Bible that God has a body as well as a spirit, just as we do. He is not some kind of ghostly being. God is a Spirit because he resides in the greater spiritual realm, which exists in heaven above our material world. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus says he is the Christ

- **The woman says to him, I know that Messiah comes, he who is called Christ. When that man comes he will declare all things to us. Jesus says to her, I who speak to thee am the man. And upon this his disciples came. And they marveled that he spoke with the woman, yet no man said, What seek thou? or, Why do thou speak with her? (John 4:25-27).**

Both the words Messiah and Christ mean the anointed. Although the Samaritans were half-breed Hebrews who had created a hybrid religion, they still anticipated the coming of the Messiah, which is shown by the comments of the woman at the well.

The Samaritans were rejected by the Jews because they were half-breed Hebrews, having intermarried with Gentiles who were forbidden by the law of Moses. For the law says, **“When Jehovah thy God shall bring thee into the land where thou go to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before thee, the Hittite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than thou, and when Jehovah thy God shall deliver them up before thee, and thou shalt smite them, then thou shalt utterly destroy them.**

“Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thy daughter thou shalt not give to his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take to thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:1-3).

After the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon, the Jews were zealous to keep themselves from foreign wives, as this passage tells: **“And Ezra the priest stood up, and said to them, Ye have trespassed, and have married foreign women to increase the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession to Jehovah, the God of your fathers, and do his pleasure, and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the for-**

eign women. Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, As thou have said concerning us, so must we do” (Ezra 10:10-12).

Consequently, the Jews would not associate with the Samaritans. Hence, both the woman and Jesus’ disciples marveled that Jesus spoke with her.

Jesus’ food was to do God’s will

- **The woman therefore left her water pot, and departed into the city, and says to the men, Come, see a man who told me all, as many things as I did. Is not this the Christ? They went out of the city, and came to him.**
- **In the meanwhile the disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said to each other, Did any man bring him to eat? Jesus says to them, My food is that I do the will of him who sent me, and may finish his work (John 4:28-34).**

The greatest desire of Jesus was to do the will of God, his heavenly Father who sent him here. That will of God for him was to defeat sin and bring eternal salvation to his lost sheep of the world. Jesus defeated sin by proving that sin was avoidable; he proved it by living a sinless life in this world filled with trials and temptations. And because he obeyed God’s will completely he earned the right to redeem all who belong to him, thus saving us for eternal life. That was the work God sent Jesus into the world to complete.

Harvesting souls

- **Do ye not say, There are still four months and the harvest comes? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and see the fields, that they are already white for harvest.**
- **And he who reaps receives a wage and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true, One is who sows, and another who reaps. I sent you to reap what ye have not labored. Others have labored, and ye have entered into their labor (John 4:35-38).**

Jesus said those things to his disciples, because he knew the people of the city would come out to see him, and he was waiting for them. It was another opportunity for him to teach his good news of salvation. His disciples did not understand, but with this example it would help prepare them for the harvest of souls from all men, not just the Jews.

The fruit of souls for God results from the labor of many men. Some sow the seed, which means they prepare the hearts of people to hear Christ. For example, righteous mothers raise their children to love truth and righteousness. Other people teach the great values of truth and righteousness. When those things are done, then the hearts of people are prepared to hear the truth of Christ, and they will be more receptive to him.

Consequently, the efforts of evangelists of the good news of Christ can reap the harvest of souls because those souls have hearts that are receptive. Souls that love truth and righteousness, and are humble and open-minded, will accept his good news when they hear it. And that is the fruit of the harvest for eternal life.

Therefore, the labor of those who reap souls is no more important than the labor of those who prepared the souls to accept the good news of Christ. Jesus did not want his disciples to think that it was only by their efforts that there could be a harvest of souls for eternal life.

And we, having labored together in different ways for the harvest of souls, we can all rejoice together. The humble mother who rears her children to be receptive to Christ, can rejoice equally with the preacher who converts them to Christ. Those who sow and those who reap work together, and Jesus says they will rejoice together.

Mary the mother of Jesus was no better than his apostles. And his apostles were no better than Mary his mother. They each had their particular duties and responsibilities for Christ's good news of salvation. Paul spoke much more about that when he described our various duties in the church to the parts of a body, each of which is important to the whole body (see First Corinthians 12).

Many Samaritans believed

- **And many of the Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all, as many things as I did. So when the Samaritans came to him they asked him to remain with them, and he remained there two days.**
- **And many more believed because of his word. And they said to the woman, We no longer believe because of thy speaking, for we have heard ourselves, and know that this really is the Savior of the world, the Christ (John 4:39-42).**

Notice how the passage says that many of the Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the woman. Even the testimony of a low ranking person can be a very powerful influence to develop faith in Christ. Therefore, we should not neglect to testify on his behalf whenever there are opportunities. My own conscience still troubles me when I think back and remember lost opportunities I had to testify for him.

Nevertheless, even if people are not convinced by our testimony, if they can be encouraged to learn about him directly (now through the New Testament), they can still develop faith in him. For those Samaritans became believers when they heard Jesus themselves, and they no longer depended upon her testimony. It is only when people close their eyes and stop their ears about him that there is no hope for them.

Regarding evangelizing Samaritans, consider these instruction that Jesus gave to his apostles when he sent them out to preach and to heal: **“These twelve Jesus sent forth, having ordered them, saying, Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And while going, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens has come near”** (Matthew 10:5-7).

Jesus told his apostles not to go to a city of the Samaritans. Yet on that occasion Jesus himself spent two days preaching to the Samaritans of that city. Although Jesus had commanded his apostles against preaching to the Samaritans and the Gentiles, after Christ ascended into heaven, when the church was established they did begin preaching to the Samaritans and the Gentiles both. Indeed, Jesus from heaven commanded both Peter and Paul to preach to the Gentiles.

However, before the church was established, his apostles were limited in their service to only the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Indeed, remember what Jesus told the Canaanite woman who pleaded for him to heal her daughter. He said to her, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). Nevertheless, because of her humble persistence he did heal her daughter.

Perhaps the reason Jesus preached to those Samaritans of that city was because they believed in the coming Messiah and they were willing to listen to him. They even came out of their city to hear him. Therefore, in his compassion he would not refuse them.

Other Samaritan cities had refused him, as told in this passage from Luke: **“And it came to pass, while fulfilling the days for his ascension, that he also set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent agents before his face, and they went. And having gone, they entered into a village of Samaritans, so as to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was going to Jerusalem”** (Luke 9:51-53).

Jesus returns to Galilee

- **And after the two days he departed from there and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own fatherland. So when he came into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem at the feast, for they also went to the feast** (John 4:43-45).

Although Jesus did not expect to be honored in his own fatherland, he still went there. Those particular Galileans who received him probably did not know him formerly as a child and a humble carpenter, as they did in Nazareth. Those Galileans received him because they saw the mighty works he did at Jerusalem during the time of the feast.

They were at the feast because it was commanded in the law of Moses. For Jehovah had said to the Israelites, **“Three times thou shall keep a feast to me in the year. Thou shall keep the feast of unleavened bread (Seven days thou shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in it thou came out from Egypt, and none shall appear before me empty), and the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labors, which thou sow in the field, and the feast of ingathering at the end of the year, when thou gather in thy labors out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the lord Jehovah”** (Exodus 23:14-17).

Healing the son of a nobleman

- **Jesus therefore came again to Cana of Galilee where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.**

This man having heard that Jesus comes out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was going to die.

- **Jesus therefore said to him, Unless ye may see signs and wonders, ye will, no, not believe. The nobleman says to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus says to him, Go, thy son lives.**
- **And the man believed the word that Jesus said to him, and he departed. And as he was now going down, his bondmen met him and reported, saying, Thy boy lives. So he inquired of them the hour in which he fared well. And they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, Thy son lives. And he himself believed and his whole house.**
- **This again is a second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judea into Galilee (John 4:46-54).**

Remember, according to the Galileans, Jesus had developed a reputation in Judea, which probably included healings. That would explain why the nobleman from Capernaum went to him for help about his son. For the only other sign he did in Galilee was turning water into wine, and probably only a few knew about that. As the passage says, **“This again is the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judea into Galilee.”**

Even though Jesus did not go down to heal the nobleman’s son, yet the man still believed him when he said his son lives. Moreover, the nobleman accepted the mild rebuke Jesus gave about not believing him unless they saw signs and wonders. Those things suggest the reputation Jesus had established in Judea was a strong one.

Our faith is not based upon seeing signs and wonders, because those things only lasted during the times before the New Testament was written. Our faith is now based upon believing the testimony give in the Bible, which includes the records of such things.

A special pool of water

- **After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the place pertaining to sheep, a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches.**
- **In these lay a great multitude of those who are feeble, blind, lame, withered, waiting for the movement of the water. For an agent went down at a certain time into the pool, and agitated the water. Therefore the first man who stepped in after the agitation of the water became well from whatever affliction he had (John 5:1-4).**

There is much mystery about that story. That special miraculous healing is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. When it began and how long it lasted is not known. However, I suspect it was only during that time period and did not last long. Indeed, it may have ended when Jesus began his ministry, because he was the source of miraculous healing

then. Nevertheless, it lasted long enough to attract many afflicted people. However, that healing was no doubt infrequent. Otherwise the place would have been mobbed by the afflicted waiting for their opportunity.

It has been suggested that the situation there had a symbolic meaning, because our spiritual salvation requires us to be immersed in water for the remission of our sins. However, I think that is reading too much into the story. I believe the lesson was mainly that Jesus had the power of God to heal without the aid of an agent from heaven. And he healed an afflicted man at the pool as more evidence of it, as the next passage says.

Jesus heals a man with paralyzed legs

- **And a certain man was there who was thirty-eight years in the weakness. When Jesus saw this man lying down, and knew that he fares now a long time, he says to him, Do thou desire to become well?**
- **The infirm man answered him, Sir, I have no man so that when the water is agitated he might put me into the pool, but while I am coming another steps down before me. Jesus says to him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk. And straightaway the man became well, and took up his bed and walked (John 5:5-9).**

No doubt all of the afflicted rushed to the pool whenever the water was agitated, because only the first man who stepped in would be healed. Why God made it that way is not told, and so we can only conjecture. Perhaps it was to reward those with the strongest faith to make themselves ready to enter the water. If the infirm man had kept himself at the edge of the pool, then he could have more quickly enter the water.

Nevertheless, that is only a conjecture. There are many mysteries about that strange marvel. However, I want to emphasize that such things no longer exist, even though there continue to be claims otherwise. Be not deceived by them.

Notice how Jesus first asked the man if he wanted to be healed. It is astonishing but true that some infirm souls actually do not want to be healed. That is especially true in today's socialist world where they can achieve financial security in their handicap. Indeed, I was told by psychologists who worked at a veteran's hospital that many of the mental cases there did not want to be healed, lest they lose their government benefits.

The Jews complained

- **Now it was sabbath on that day. The Jews therefore said to the man who was cured, It is sabbath. It is not permitted for thee to take up the bed. He answered them, The man who made me well, that man said to me, Take up thy bed and walk. Therefore they asked him, Who is the man who said to thee, Take up thy bed and walk? But the man who was healed had not known who he is, for Jesus withdrew, a multitude being in the place.**

- **After these things Jesus finds him in the temple, and said to him, Behold, thou have become well. Sin no more, lest something worse may happen to thee. The man departed and reported to the Jews that Jesus is the man who made him well (John 5:9-15).**

The Jews were so blinded by their rigid legalism that they could not even appreciate the miracle Jesus performed when he healed that handicapped man. All they were concerned about was obedience to the traditions they had added to the law of the sabbath. For Moses never forbade such things as a man taking up his bed on that day.

The man that Jesus healed was disabled for thirty-eight years, but nothing is said about his age. He had probably become disabled at some time after his birth, because after Jesus healed the man he later found him in the temple and told him to sin no more lest something worse may happen to him. That not only indicates he became paralyzed long after his birth, but it suggests he sinned in some way to cause it. The “something worse” that might happen to him was no doubt a reference to the eternal fires of hell for unrepentant sinners.

That is the only time in the Bible where Jesus told someone he healed to sin no more. For, as the book of Job teaches us, not all of our suffering is caused by our own sins. All evil is caused by sin, but many of us suffer innocently from the sins of others, even though we are all guilty of sin, more or less.

The healed man apparently did not inform Jesus that the Jews had criticized him for telling him to take up his bed and walk. Instead, he went to the Jews and told them who made him well. Why he did those things is not told. Nevertheless, the man did not seem to show much gratitude for being healed, which contrasts greatly with a blind man that Jesus later healed. The character of our spirit is the most important thing about us. For it will determine our eternal destiny, whether we are saved for eternal life or not.

God continues to work

- **And because of this the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he did these things on a sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My Father works until now and I work (John 5:16-17).**

Remember, Jesus was actually Jehovah of the Old Testament (see First Corinthians 10:4), and it was he who gave Moses the command about observing the sabbath day. That is why Jesus could say about himself, **“For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath”** (Matthew 12:8), and, **“The sabbath came into being for sake of man, and not man for sake of the sabbath”** (Mark 2:27). The sabbath was given to be a blessing for them and not a burden. Nevertheless, the Jews were so blinded by their mentality of legalism that regardless of how much good Jesus did they wanted to kill him.

Notice how Jesus said that his Father works until now and he works. God rested on the seventh day of the creation, but that rest was not perpetual. He rested one day, not forever. And the work he does includes keeping this world functioning. I explain that in much more detail in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. And Jesus certainly did a lot of work while he was here. For remember, at the end of his biography of Jesus, John said,

“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly” (John 21:25).

Equal with God

- **Because of this therefore the Jews sought even more to kill him, because not only did he relax the sabbath, but also he called God his own Father, making himself equal to God (John 5:18).**

Jesus did indeed call God his own Father, because he was God’s only begotten Son. But that is the only way Jesus made himself equal with God. He was equal with God only in the same way our sons are equal with us; they are equally human. There are many places in this book where Jesus denied complete equality with the Father. His reply to their accusation of equality to God is one of them, which response is quoted immediately below.

Dependent upon God

- **Jesus therefore answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, except what he sees the Father doing. For whatever he may do, the Son also does these things in like manner (John 5:19).**

Jesus humbly confessed that he could do nothing of himself, and we should confess the same toward Jesus. For Jesus said to his apostles, **“... without me ye can do nothing”** (John 15:5). Jesus said he only did what he saw his Father doing, which means doing what his father commanded him.

And we should do nothing except what Jesus commands of us. That means to live our lives, not in a narrow legalistic way, but according to the principles of righteousness that he taught. Consider these words of Paul: **“All things are permitted for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are permitted for me, but not all things are constructive”** (First Corinthians 10:23). He also said, **“And all things, anything whatever ye may do, work from soul as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord ye will receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ”** (Colossians 3:23-24).

Things that are not constructive and expedient fall in the categories of sin and folly. Nevertheless remember, we are not under a legal system with God. We have much liberty to decide what is right and what is not right, within the principles of his righteousness.

The Son does the works of the Father

- **For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does. And he will show him works greater than these, so that ye may marvel. For as the Father raises up the dead and makes alive, so also the Son makes alive whom he will. For neither does the Father judge any man, but he has given all judgment to the Son, so that all would honor the Son, even as they**

honor the Father. The man not honoring the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him (John 5:20-23).

The Father and the Son are in perfect oneness, and they work together in perfect accord. Although the Father is the source of the works, he shows everything to the Son. The words “show him” do not simply mean to give him awareness. They mean to give him the power as well. And Jesus gave the example of raising the dead to life, which only the Father and the Son are able to perform. Jesus proved his power by doing it more than once, which were indeed great marvels.

God has so much confidence in his Son that he has given him all the authority to judge. Therefore, the Son is the one who determines who is given eternal life, and who is cast into hell, the lake of fire that burns forever. He is the one we will stand before on the great day of judgment. But that is not the only way the Son judges. The Father has made the Son like an executive officer to him. The Son is the authority who carries out all the will of God. I say much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Therefore, it is our duty and obligation to honor the Son. For speaking of the Son, Paul said, **“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of the heavenly, and the earthly, and the sub-earthly, and that every tongue should acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (Philippians 2:9-11).

Notice how Jesus said the man who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. Jews who reject Christ, worship God in vain. They may think they are worshipping God, but they are not honoring him, because they reject his Son. Indeed, by their very rejection of Jesus as the Christ, they are dishonoring God. And that is true of every member of every other religion, because they do not believe and obey Jesus Christ.

Passing from death to life

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, that he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life. And he does not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, that an hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.**
- **For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man.**
- **Marvel not at this, because an hour comes in which all those in the sepulchers will hear his voice, and will come forth, those who have done right to a resurrection of life, and those who have practiced wrong to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:24-29).**

When Jesus said that believers *have* eternal life, he was being literal. For our spirit is our enduring self, not our flesh. The flesh of every man will perish, but the spirit of every believer will continue to live. Our flesh is the habitation for our spirit during this life. But

when that habitation perishes, we who believe in Christ will be given a new habitation. We will pass from the death of our body of flesh into an imperishable body with eternal life.

Our spirit will simply go from our body of flesh to a spiritual body from heaven. For Paul said, **“For we know that if the earthly house of our tent were destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. For also in this we groan, longing to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven ...”** (Second Corinthians 5:1-2). We will never experience existence in hell, which is called the second death (see Revelation 20:14). The second death is a living death of eternal torment. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus did not seek his own will

- **I can from myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I seek not my will, but the will of the Father who sent me** (John 5:30).

Many times Jesus confessed that he was not equal with the God the Father. And the above passage is one of them. He confessed he could do nothing from himself. Everything he did originated with the Father. He said his judgment was righteous because it was not according to his own will. His judgment is righteous because it is the will of the Father who sent him. Jesus is an obedient Son, doing the will of his Father.

Jesus never claimed equality with God the Father in power and authority. He only claimed equality in being of the same nature as the Father. Jesus was God but not God the Father. He is God in the same way that we are human, being the son of a human father. As the son of a man is equally human with his father, so Jesus is equally God. But he is not equal with God in his origin, or in his power and authority. He is the only begotten Son of God.

Jesus is not God the Father himself, as the false theory of the trinity claims. Supporters of that theory claim that Jesus was only subject to God, and dependent upon him, during the time of his “incarnation,” meaning while he had a body of flesh. The Bible never speaks of Jesus being incarnate. Indeed, the words incarnate and incarnation are nowhere found in the Bible. Nor is the idea of it.

The so-called incarnate Christ is based upon the false idea that neither God nor Christ in heaven have bodies. That idea says they are pure spirits only, which contradicts the record of the Bible. For you can read a description of the divine body of Christ in Revelation 1:13-16. And that description is also about the body of God, because the book of Hebrews says that the Son of God is **“the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence ...”** (Hebrews 1:3), referring to God the Father.

Testifying about Jesus

- **If I testify about myself, my witness is not valid. There is another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony that he testifies about me is valid** (John 5:31-32).

When Jesus said his testimony alone was not valid, he was referring to a principle based upon this law of Moses: **“One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins. At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established”** (Deuteronomy 19:15). There would be much more justice in America if our country applied that principle, as well as many others from the word of God.

What Jesus meant by another who testified about him was God the Father. God was testifying about him through the many miracles he was doing. Those miraculous works could only have come from God, and therefore they testified that God was with Jesus. Remember this passage earlier in John’s biography of Jesus: **“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him”** (John 3:1-2).

And as Jesus said, God’s testimony alone was valid; genuine miracles are proof enough. There have been no genuine miracles performed since the days of the early church. There have been, and continue to be, impressive signs and wonders done by men, but they are never genuine miracles. And careful investigation always proves them to be clever but non-miraculous things.

The testimony of John

- **Ye have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. But I do not take the testimony from man. However, I say these things, so that ye may be saved. That man was the lamp that burns and shines, and ye were willing to rejoice for an hour in his light** (John 5:33-35).

Jesus did not need the testimony of John the immerser, but he still mentioned him because the people accepted John as a prophet from God. Jesus said that John has testified to the truth, which truth is that Jesus is the Son of God. Notice how Jesus equated John’s testimony about him to the truth. Indeed, there is nothing more true than that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. For the evidence as reported in the Bible is overwhelming. And every man who loves truth and righteousness will know it.

Hence, John’s testimony that Jesus was the Son of God would help the people believe in him, which would enable them to be saved. Jesus always praised John because he was a great prophet who first proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God to the world. And the people rejoiced in the knowledge he taught them. However, Jesus superseded John, and he brought the greatest truth and light to them.

The works of Jesus testify of him

- **But I have testimony greater than of John, for the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father, he who sent me, has testified about me** (John 5:36-37).

The works of the Father that Jesus spoke about were the many mighty miracles of healing that he did. Any one of those miracles of healing that Jesus did is completely impossible for anybody without the power God. That was how the Father had testified about him, that he was sent by God. And that was indeed greater testimony than the testimony of John.

Those works were clear proof that God sent him; they testified to the authenticity of Jesus. Remember what Nicodemus said about it: “... **no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him**” (John 3:2). What greater testimony could any man ever have than those mighty works? Only the hardness of their hearts kept those Jews from accepting Jesus.

They neither knew God nor loved him

- **Ye have neither heard his voice, nor have ever seen his appearance. And ye have not his word dwelling in you, because ye do not believe that man whom he sent for this.**
- **Ye search the scriptures, because ye think to have eternal life in them, and those are testifying about me. And ye will not come to me, so that ye may have life.**
- **I do not receive glory from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God within yourselves** (John 5:37-42).

Jesus spoke those words to the Jews who wanted to kill him. They criticized him for not adhering to their narrow and rigid interpretation of the sabbath day. They studied the scriptures (the Old Testament), but the word of God was not in them because they did not understand correctly what was taught. They interpreted the words legalistically, thinking the Bible was simply a book of rules. They looked for the “formula” to give them eternal life, but there is no formula. Eternal life comes from the quality of a man’s spirit. And those Jews did not have that quality, because the love of God was not in them.

None of those Jews had ever heard the voice of God, nor had they ever seen his appearance. In contrast to them, Jesus had been in the very bosom of the Father, being his only begotten Son. Those Jews did not really know God. They had an erroneous concept of what he is like, and that is true of most of the world. Moreover, most of the world has a very erroneous concept of what Jesus Christ is like. Only by studying the word of God, the Holy Bible, can we learn what God and his Son are truly like, because the spirit of the devil in men tries to pervert the truth about them.

Regarding the matter of hearing the voice of God and seeing his appearance, the ancient Israelites in the wilderness did hear the voice of Jehovah God, and they saw his appearance. They heard his voice when he spoke the words of the ten commandments to them from the top of mount Sinai (see Exodus 20).

Here is what happened after God spoke to them that way: “**And all the people perceived the thunders, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us,**

lest we die” (Exodus 20:18-19). The power of his voice was a terrifying experience to them.

Not long after that happened Jehovah commanded Moses to bring the leaders of the people on the mountain to him. Here is the record of that: **“Then Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up. And they saw the God of Israel. And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. And he laid not his hand upon the nobles of the sons of Israel. And they beheld God, and ate and drank”** (Exodus 24:9-11). Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu were chosen to be the high priests.

Nevertheless, none of those experiences involved God the Father. They heard and saw Jehovah, who was Jesus Christ the Son of God. For remember, Paul said, **“But I want you not to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all in Moses were immersed in the cloud and in the sea. And they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ”** (First Corinthians 10:1-4).

The Bible only tells about one man besides Jesus who ever heard and saw God the Father in heaven, and he was the apostle John. He experienced those things during his great vision many years after Jesus ascended back to heaven. That vision is described in the book of Revelation.

Being accepted by men

- **I have come in my Father’s name, and ye do not accept me. If another man should come in his own name, ye will accept that man** (John 5:43).

Men will listen to what other men say, but they do not want to hear what God says. The truth in the word of God has never been popular, and the prophets he sent to the people were all persecuted. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“Blessed are ye when they revile you, and persecute you, and say every evil word, being deceitful against you because of me. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, because your reward is great in the heavens, for so they persecuted the prophets before you”** (Matthew 5:11-12). That is how it was in the past, and that is how it is now. Proclaim the truth of God to them and they will hate you.

Men who speak of themselves are accepted by the world. For the world honors its own, as Jesus said farther in this book: **“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world (instead I chose you out of the world), because of this the world hates you”** (John 15:19). And I find it fantastic how some of the most ridiculous ideas of men have been accepted by them. Yet they reject the truth of God. For us who know God it is amazing!

Glory from men versus glory from God

- **How can ye believe, who receive glory from each other, and seek not the glory from the only God?** (John 5:44).

It is common throughout the world for men to seek approval and praise from each other, instead of seeking the approval and praise from God. The apostle John even said that about the rulers of the Jews who believed in Jesus: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43).

Regarding praise, no man can receive glory from both men and God. We all must choose which to seek. Every man who seeks glory from both is like the man who tries to serve both God and mammon. For Jesus said, **“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”** (Matthew 6:24). Beware of scoffers who deny what Jesus taught.

Their vain hope in Moses

- **Think not that I will accuse you to the Father. The man who accuses you is Moses, in whom ye have hoped. For if ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for that man wrote about me. But if ye believe not the writings of that man, how will ye believe my sayings?** (John 5:45-47).

Here is what Moses wrote about Jesus: **“Jehovah thy God will raise up for thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brothers, like me. Ye shall hearken to him, according to all that thou desired of Jehovah thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Jehovah my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I not die.**

“And Jehovah said to me, They have well said that which they have spoken. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, who shall speak a word presumptuously in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who shall speak in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:15-20). (Remember, the name Jehovah is used sometimes to refer to the God the Father, and sometimes to refer to the Son of God, and sometimes to both of them.)

Jesus was a prophet like Moses because he was a lawgiver. Jesus came to supplant the old law of Moses with a new law: **“... the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:2). That law is not a new legal system with a new set of statutes and ordinances. Instead, it is a new way of being, a new way of thinking and living. It is our being a new creation. For Paul said, **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”** (Second Corinthians 5:17).

The Jews who rejected Jesus claimed to believe in Moses. In truth they were hypocrites who honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from him. As Jesus said to them, **“Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, This people comes near me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** (Matthew 15:7-9).

Those Jews had perverted the law of Moses, and created a kind of hybrid system from it, one they approved for themselves. It was one that satisfied their consciences while still allowing them to practice their evil behavior, such as to **“devour widows’ houses, and praying long in pretence”** (Matthew 23:14). That perverted hybrid system is called Judaism, and it was never approved of God.

Jesus on a mountain with his disciples

- **After these things Jesus went to the other side of the sea of Galilee (of Tiberias). And a great multitude followed him because they saw his signs, which he did on those who are infirm. And Jesus went up onto the mountain, and he sat there with his disciples** (John 6:1-3).

The great multitude of people followed Jesus because they saw his mighty works of healing. And people are naturally attracted to anything spectacular (if it is non-threatening). They were not interested in his teachings. Therefore, Jesus went on the mountain with his disciples; they were the minority who did want to hear his teachings. He probably went up on the mountain to escape being crowded by the multitude as well as to be separated from them with his disciples.

Remember, his famous sermon on the mount began this way: **“And having seen the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. And when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And having opened his mouth, he taught them, saying ...”** (Matthew 5:1-2). He taught lessons to his disciples, but not to the multitudes, because he only spoke to the multitudes in parables.

Remember this passage which explains why: **“And the disciples having come, they said to him, Why do thou speak to them in parables? And having answered, he said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him.**

“Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them.

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:10-16).

Concern about the multitude

- **Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. Jesus therefore having lifted up his eyes, and having seen that a great multitude comes to him, he says to Philip, From where will we buy loaves, so that these may eat?**

- **But he said this testing him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, Loaves of two hundred denarii of bread are not sufficient for them, so that each of them may take a little something (John 6:4-7).**

Even though Jesus was disappointed with the multitudes and their lack of desire to become his disciples, nevertheless, he was concerned that the multitude of people who followed him had enough to eat. Indeed, when he later fed the four thousand, he said to his disciples, **“I feel compassion toward the multitude because they continue with me now three days and do not have what they might eat. And I do not want to dismiss them without food, lest they might faint on the way”** (Matthew 15:32).

It is interesting that Jesus first tested Philip about the problem of feeding the great multitude. When Jesus asked him how they could do it, Philip said in effect that it was impossible for them. For a denarii was a typical days wage, and Philip said it would take two hundred of them just to give them a little something. Apparently Philip did not yet realize the full impact of Jesus being the Son of God and capable of doing most anything.

The passage mentions the Passover feast being near. That may be another reason why there was a great multitude there following Jesus. Perhaps many had heard of Jesus, and they departed their homes early to see him before they went to the feast at Jerusalem. For the law of Moses said that the Passover feast could only be celebrated at the place God would choose. The place later chosen was Jerusalem.

That law of Moses said, **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Jehovah thy God, for in the month of Abib Jehovah thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. And thou shall sacrifice the Passover to Jehovah thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which Jehovah shall choose to cause his name to dwell there”** (Deuteronomy 16:1-2).

Feeding five thousand men

- **One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, says to him, There is one child here that has five barley loaves and two fishes, but what are these for so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.**
- **And Jesus took the loaves, and having expressed thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those who were sitting down, likewise also of the fishes as much as they wanted (John 6:8-11).**

After the men sat down, Jesus expressed thanks to God for the food. Then he gave the loaves and the fishes to his disciples to distribute to the people. And the loaves and fishes that Jesus was given were not used up until there was enough to feed all the people, **“as much as they wanted.”**

That was another astonishing miracle. It must have taken several thousand pounds of bread and fishes to feed that many people. Remember, the women and children were not

even counted. Only men were numbered, because God has never sanctioned equality of women with men, except in our potential to become sons of God for eternity.

There is a story in the Old Testament that is similar to that miracle. It involves the prophet Elisha, who is referred to in the passage as a man of God: **“And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, Give to the people that they may eat. And his servant said, What, should I set this before a hundred men?”**

“But he said, Give to the people that they may eat, for thus says Jehovah, They shall eat, and shall leave of it. So he set it before them, and they ate, and left of it according to the word of Jehovah” (Second Kings 4:42-44). What Jesus did was a much greater miracle.

The fishes that Jesus distributed were no doubt cooked before being eaten. That is indicated by this passage about a time Jesus appeared to some of his apostles after his resurrection: **“So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals set, and fish laying on it, and bread”** (John 21:9).

No waste or litter

- **And when they were filled, he says to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain over, so that not anything may be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets of fragments from the five barley loaves that remained over from those who have eaten** (John 6:8-13).

There was no waste of that surplus food, nor was any of it left behind as rubbish on the ground. It is sin to waste and litter, especially food. Americans greatly increased their waste and litter of food (and their containers) when they forsook God to become pagan. Notice how the fragments of the barley loaves were saved, but nothing of the fish. Anything left of the fish was probably buried, because meat was much more difficult and dangerous to preserve during those times.

Wanting to make him king

- **When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone** (John 6:14-15).

Remember what the text said earlier about the multitude following him: **“... a great multitude followed him because they saw his signs, which he did on those who are infirm”** (John 6:2). Even though they had seen those signs of healing they did not then seek to make him king. It was only after he fed five thousand men with five barley loaves and two fishes that they sought to make him king.

That action revealed their values; it showed where their heart was. For Jesus later said to them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled”** (John 6:26). They were basically selfish people who

were more impressed with being fed than with seeing the infirm being healed. Things like that help explain why Jesus did not teach them lessons, but only spoke to them in parables. They were undeserving.

Jesus did not need their support to become king, because he was already their king. Indeed, his claim to be king is how the Jews were able to force Pilate to crucify him, as the record says: **“From this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend. Every man who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar”** (John 19:12).

Not only was Jesus the king of the Jews, but the Bible says he is **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14). Yet not one nation upon the earth recognizes Jesus as their king. Nevertheless, Jesus did not come into the world to reign over a worldly kingdom. He came to establish the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, which kingdom is manifested in the world as the church. It is a spiritual nation consisting of the members of disciples of Christ scattered throughout the world.

Jesus walks on the sea

- **And when it became evening his disciples went down to the sea, and having entered into the boat, they were going to the other side of the sea toward Capernaum. And it had already become dark, and Jesus had not come to them. And the sea was being raised by a great wind blowing.**
- **Therefore having impelled forward about twenty-five or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and coming near to the boat, and they were afraid. But he says to them, It is I, fear not. They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat, and straightaway the boat came to be at the land to which they were going** (John 6:16-21).

Jesus did not walk on the sea to make life easier for himself. He spared his disciples from having to come back to get him. Moreover, he did not fly effortlessly across the water; he walked. And walking always requires effort, especially if the terrain is rough. And the water was indeed very rough and wavy because a great wind was blowing. As a result I suspect he walked vigorously and with labor. Therefore, think not that even though Jesus walked on the water it was easy for him.

A furlong is an eighth of a mile. Hence, the boat had gone forward between three and four miles before they saw Jesus walking on the water. And that means Jesus was walking on that rough sea for almost two hours.

Being in the dark of night it was natural for his disciples to be fearful when they saw someone walking on the sea. Jesus did not rebuke them for that natural reaction, but instead encouraged them and revealed himself. God knows what it is like to live in this world of danger and darkness. He lived here with us through his son Jesus Christ.

This record of that event says that after Jesus was received into the boat, it straightaway came to be at the land where they were going. Straightaway can mean immediately. However, it can also mean soon. And that is probably what happened with the boat. It came to the land soon after Jesus was received into it.

The multitude seeks Jesus

- **On the morrow the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea, having seen that there was no other boat there except that one in which his disciples entered, and that Jesus did not go with his disciples into the boat, but his disciples went away alone, and other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord expressed thanks, when therefore the multitude saw that Jesus is not there, nor his disciples, they entered into the boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus (John 6:22-24).**

Jesus and his apostles were now on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, having come over during the night. Matthew's biography of Jesus said they came to the land of Gennesaret (see Matthew 14:34). The land of Gennesaret was a fertile plain on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, about half way between Tiberias and Capernaum. However, Jesus and his apostles must have gone from there on foot to Capernaum, because the text later says they were there.

The multitude was standing on the other side of the sea, on the eastern shore. They were puzzled where Jesus was, because they did not see him depart in the boat with his disciples. They saw other boats, but those came from Tiberias, which was a town in the middle of the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nevertheless, apparently assuming that Jesus was with his disciples, they entered boats to go to Capernaum across the sea. Capernaum was on the northern shore about five miles from Tiberias. Those in the boats from Tiberias must have told them Jesus was not at Tiberias. Hence, the multitudes went to Capernaum instead, seeking for Jesus.

Food that endures to eternal life

- **And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did thou become here? Jesus answered them and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled. Work not for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you, for God the Father put a seal on this man (John 6:25-27).**

Jesus did not answer their question because it was a trivial one. Instead, he taught them about things that were important. He first rebuked them for their values. They valued food for their bodies more than food for their souls. Remember, the previous day Jesus had fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes, and that was what impressed them.

What Jesus meant by the food that endures to eternal life, is knowledge of his good news of salvation. For that knowledge is nourishment for our souls. When ingested into our minds it energizes us and it sustains our spirits, sustaining them for eternity. That food is much more important than food for our bodies. Therefore, Jesus said we should work (primarily) for the food that endures to eternal life, not for food that perishes.

Remember, Jesus had earlier compared his teachings with living water when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Here he compares his teachings with food that endures to eternal life. Jesus always emphasized knowing about, and believing in his good news of salvation and eternal life.

Notice how Jesus said that God the Father put a seal on the Son of man. A seal is a mark of authenticity. And the seal that God put on his Son Jesus Christ was his power to perform miracles. For only God can give that power. Therefore, a denial of Jesus is a denial of God who put his seal upon him.

Working the works of God

- **They said to him therefore, What shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered, and said to them, This is the work of God, that ye believe in that man whom he has sent (John 6:28-29).**

The work of God is faith in Jesus Christ, a living and working faith that includes obedience to all of his commandments. Much of what Jesus did and said to the Jews was to create that faith in him. He performed many marvelous miracles of healing in their sight. And he taught them the wonderful words of the good news of eternal salvation for their souls.

For the only way the soul of any man can be saved for eternal life is for him to believe in Christ. Therefore, Jesus spent much time attempting to persuade them. Not even God himself can convert the soul of an unrepentant sinner. And no unrepentant sinner can enter the new Jerusalem of heaven. If God allowed sinners to live there, that place would end up as full of sin and wickedness as it is in this world.

Bread from heaven

- **They said to him therefore, What sign do thou, that we may see and believe in thee? What do thou work? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.**
- **Jesus therefore said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread out of heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world (John 6:30-33).**

Those Jews were so blind in their hearts they could not see that he had been giving them many signs that proved he was from God. Their hearts were still focused on their bellies. They wanted food for their bodies to be as freely available as it was when the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, which only required them to go out and gather it.

The miraculous bread that God gave the sons of Israel in the wilderness literally came from the sky because it fell at night like dew upon the ground. It was called manna, and it only existed until they entered into their promised land. You can read about that bread in Exodus 16. Since the manna was nourishment that came to the people from heaven (the sky), therefore Jesus applied that miraculous bread to himself. For he came from heaven

(the higher spiritual heaven) to give them the spiritual nourishment their souls needed for eternal life.

Notice how Jesus corrected the misconception the people had about who gave them that bread out of heaven. Apparently they were giving Moses credit for giving it to them. Jesus made it clear to them that Moses did not give them that bread out of heaven, but it was God his Father. And God was giving them the true bread out of heaven. It was true bread because it gives eternal life. And that bread was Jesus Christ who came out of heaven into the world to save their souls.

Jesus the bread of life

- **They said to him therefore, Lord, always give us this bread. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will, no, not hunger, and he who believes in me will, no, not ever thirst. But also I said to you, that ye have seen me, and yet do not believe (John 6:34-36).**

The Jews did not understand what Jesus was saying about himself. They were still thinking of their bellies, because they did not understand the symbolism of what Jesus was saying. Therefore, he said plainly that he was the bread of life. He told those Jews that whoever came to him will never hunger. He also told them that whoever believed in him would never thirst, just as he had to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Hunger and thirst indicate needs of the body. And by coming to Jesus and believing in him we will never again have any needs for our soul. We will have God's promise of eternal life with incorruptible bodies in the world of heaven.

Those Jew were seeing the very Son of God before their eyes. He had been with God in heaven even before the world began. In fact, he worked with God the Father to create the world. Yet those Jews did not believe in him. They did not believe in him because he did not conform to their preconceived idea about the Messiah. He was not a mighty warrior-king. He was a poor and humble man who went about teaching and healing. The most those Jews could think of him was that he was a prophet.

He who comes to Jesus

- **All that the Father gives me will come to me, and he who comes to me I will, no, not cast out. Because I have come down from heaven, not so that I might do my will, but the will of him who sent me (John 6:37-38).**

We all belong to God, because he created each one of us. Fathers and mothers merely join their seed together to begin the growth of the child that God creates in the woman's womb. Adam is the first man that God created and breathed his divine Spirit into (see Genesis 2:7). And as every child now inherits his body from Adam, so also every child now inherits his divine spirit from Adam.

And like that of Adam, our spirit is first pure and innocent. However, like Adam, we all eventually sin and defile our spirit. Most men continue to live in sin and defile themselves. However, there are some who are humble and lowly, and who repent of their sins because

they love truth and righteousness. Those are the ones that God gives to Jesus. They are the ones who come to him. They are his sheep, because Jesus said later to the Jews, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”** (John 10:27).

Those special souls who love truth and righteousness are the ones that God gives to Jesus. And when they hear his words (which now come from the Bible) they will follow him. And Jesus said he would no, not cast out anyone who comes to him. By using the double negative Jesus made what he said emphatic; he will emphatically not cast out anyone who comes to him. That means Jesus will never reject any person who comes to him to be a disciple, whether that person is male or female, young or old, is physically strong or weak, is rich or poor, has dark skin or light skin, is Jew or Gentile. Whoever comes to him, he will no, not cast out.

Notice how much Jesus emphasized the Father over himself. It is the Father who gives him disciples, those who come to him. And it was to perform the will of the Father that Jesus came down from heaven; he did not come into the world to do his own will. And it was the Father who sent him. Jesus never claimed equality with the Father.

Regarding the will of God, not only do unbelievers rebel against God and do their own will, but there are false Christians in the world who rebel against God and insist on doing their own will. They claim the authority to add to the word of God. And they claim the authority to reject things that the Bible teaches us to obey. The Spirit of Christ is not in them. Instead, the spirit of the devil is in them, and they do his will, rebelling against the examples and the teachings that Jesus gave us.

Jesus gives eternal life

- **And this is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all that he has given me I would not lose from it, but I will raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me, that every man who sees the Son, and believes in him, may have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day** (John 6:39-40).

Jesus sometimes spoke in riddles. And the first sentence in that passage is one of them. What was the “all” in the words **“... of *all* that he has given me ...”**? And what was the “it” in the words **“... I would not lose from *it*, but I will raise *it* up at the last day”**? (The italics are mine.) Both words “all” and “it” in the original Greek text are in the neuter singular form and they both seem to refer to the same thing. (Greek words referring to the church are sometimes in the neuter gender, sometimes in the masculine gender, and sometimes in the feminine gender.) The words “all” and “it” in that passage both seem to refer to his church, the kingdom of God.

The lesson Jesus seems to be giving in that passage, is that God is he who gave the church to him. And it is the will of God that he would not lose anyone from it, but would raise it up at the last day, meaning at the end of the world. Christ’s church is the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God. And all who belong to it will be raised up to heaven at the last day to live for eternity in the kingdom of God there.

It was the will of the Father who sent Jesus that he would not lose any of those he gave to him. And for those who remain faithful till death he does not lose any of them. When Jesus

was being arrested, he told how he did not lose any of his faithful apostles. For the passage says, **“Again therefore he questioned them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus answered, I told you that I am. If therefore ye seek me, allow these men to go, so that the word that he spoke might be fulfilled, Of whom thou have given me, I lost, no, not one of them”** (John 18:7-9).

Only Judas was lost because he did not remain faithful to him. For during his prayer during the time of the last supper, Jesus said about his apostles, **“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name. Whom thou gave to me, I kept, and none of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction, so that the scripture might be fulfilled”** (John 17:12).

Notice that Jesus said again he was not doing his own will, but the will of him who sent him, meaning God the Father. Jesus never claimed equality of authority with God.

Jesus is the bread that came out of heaven

- **The Jews therefore murmured about him because he said, I am the bread that came down out of heaven. And they said, Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? Therefore how does this man say, I have come down out of heaven? (John 6:41-42).**

Remember, Jesus was in Galilee at this time. He was born and raised there, and many of the people there knew him and his parents before he began his ministry. Therefore, they were puzzled by the claim he made about being the bread that came down out of heaven. They did not understand how he could have come down out of heaven. Nor did they understand the symbolism of the bread he applied to himself.

Hence, they murmured about him. The word murmur in the Bible commonly implies criticism and grumbling against somebody or something. They not only did not understand what Jesus was saying, but they did not like what he was telling them about himself.

Being drawn to Christ

- **Jesus therefore answered and said to them, Murmur not among each other. No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day (John 6:43-44).**

Jesus told the people not to murmur. Those whom the Father gives him would not murmur; they would be drawn to Jesus. For Jesus said that no man can come to him unless the Father who send him draws him. Hence, those whom the Father gives him would not murmur.

But then, how does the Father draw a man to Jesus? God knows the hearts of all men. He knows who are worthy of salvation and who are not. Those who are unworthy will not hearken to Jesus because God blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts. The apostle John spoke about that farther in this book when he told why the Jews rejected Jesus (see John 12:37-40).

In contrast, God opens the eyes and softens the hearts of those who are worthy of eternal life so that they will be drawn to Jesus. Every man whose eyes are open and whose heart is tender will listen to the words of the Father that Jesus was proclaiming. And having listened and learned he will be drawn to Jesus. Such men will be drawn to him because they love truth and righteousness, and that is what Jesus was proclaiming.

Regarding his words about raising people up, remember, earlier Jesus said that of all that the Father gave him he would not lose from it, but would raise it up at the last day. He also said it was the will of the Father who sent him that every man who saw the Son, and believed in him, may have eternal life, and he would raise him up at the last day. And now for the third time he told of raising people up. This time he said that every man whom the Father drew to him comes to him, and he will raise him up in the last day.

Being raised up in the last day means, of course, our divine spirit is taken up to heaven at the end of the world to be given an incorruptible body and live as sons of God for eternity.

Hearing, learning, and coming to Jesus

- **It is written in the prophets, And they will all be taught of God. Every man who hears from the Father, and having learned, comes to me** (John 6:45).

Isaiah is one of the prophets who wrote that all would be taught of God. What Jesus said is part of those words: **“Sing, O barren, thou who did not bear. Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou who did not travail with child. For more are the sons of the desolate than the sons of the married woman, says Jehovah. ... And all thy sons shall be taught of Jehovah, and great shall be the peace of thy sons”** (Isaiah 54:1,13). Paul quoted that passage from Isaiah when he was speaking to the Galatians about the church, which includes men from all nations (see Galatians 4:27).

Jesus probably mentioned that prophecy, about how all would be taught of God, in order to show the necessity of teaching for souls to come to him. A man first needs to hear from the Father (by hearing the word of God), and having learned from God's word, then he will come to Jesus. Those men who hear the word of God will learn it and come to Jesus. Remember however, the kind of hearing required is an understanding of the words, not simply hearing the sounds. And every righteous man who truly understands the word of God will come to Jesus.

The ancient scholars of the Jews heard the word of God, but their eyes were blind to understanding. And modern scholars are equally blind to understanding the word of God. Those ancient scholars scoffed at the word of God that Jesus spoke to them. And modern scholars scoff about all the words of the Bible being the word of God. They do not believe it. And they slander it and all who do believe it.

Having seen the Father

- **Not that any man has seen the Father, except he who is from God. This man has seen the Father** (John 6:46).

Earlier I told about who has seen and who has not seen the Father in my comments about John 5:37-42, where Jesus said to the Jews, **“Ye have neither heard his voice, nor have**

ever seen his appearance.” Jesus has seen the Father because he is the Son of God who was begotten in heaven. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Having eternal life

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me has eternal life** (John 6:47).

Jesus said that every man who believes in him already has eternal life. For when we obey him and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins, we are begotten again with the guarantee of eternal life—if we remain faithful to him until the end. Our renewed spirit will never perish, even when this body of flesh does. For as long as we remain faithful to Jesus we have eternal life.

The bread of life is the flesh of Christ

- **I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down out of heaven, that a man may eat of it, and not die. I am the living bread, having come down out of heaven. If any man eats of this bread, he will live into the age. And also, the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world**
- **The Jews therefore contended with each other, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?** (John 6:48-52).

The manna came down from the sky and became like the dew on the ground. That is why it was called the bread from heaven (see Exodus 16:4). Bread nourishes our bodies, provides them with energy, and keeps them alive. However, like everything we eat for our bodies, that bread cannot keep our bodies from eventually dying.

Jesus was also bread from heaven. And as material bread nourishes our bodies, provides them with energy, and keeps them alive, so also Jesus does the same things with our divine spirits. Through him we have spiritual nourishment, energy, and life. He gives us those things because he is the bread of life that came down, not from the sky, but from the highest heaven. And it is only by eating of that bread (figuratively) that we can live into the age, the new age of eternal life in the highest heaven. We eat of the living bread by learning and accepting his teachings in our minds and in our hearts.

Those Jews could not understand that Jesus was speaking figuratively, because their eyes were blinded and their hearts were hardened. They were unable to think spiritually. Hence, they could not understand how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. His words were a riddle to them.

Jesus did not give his flesh for us to literally eat. However, Jesus did give his flesh in a literal sense when he sacrificed himself by allowing the Jews to crucify him. It was only by that sacrifice that Jesus was able to become our Redeemer and save us from the condemnation of our sins. Hence, he literally gave his flesh for the life of the world—to give the world the opportunity to have eternal life. For only those who eat (figuratively) of the

bread of life will have eternal life. Only those who believe in him, and accept his teachings will have eternal life in heaven.

Eating his flesh and drinking his blood

- **Jesus therefore said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him.**
- **Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, also he who eats me, that man will also live because of me. This is the bread that came down out of heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna and died. He who eats this bread will live into the age (John 6:53-58).**

Jesus again used the analogy of the manna to himself. The manna was bread that came down out of the heavens of the sky, dropping like dew upon the ground. However, that manna never gave eternal life to those who ate of it. Only the bread that came down out of the highest heaven—Jesus Christ the Son of God—enables those who eat of it (figuratively) to live into the age, to live in the new age of eternal life.

And Jesus again emphasized the necessity of eating his flesh in order to have eternal life. And this time he added the necessity of drinking his blood. No man can have life in himself unless he eats the flesh of the Son of man and drinks his blood. Remember, Jesus was speaking figuratively. His flesh and blood symbolized the words of the good news that he was teaching them.

Knowledge of that good news would be the nourishment for their souls to give them eternal life. But that would only happen if they ingested those words into their hearts to make that knowledge a part of them, so that they would be transformed away from a life of sin to a life of obedience to the righteousness of God. When we ingest the teachings of Christ in our minds to make them a part of us, changing how we think and how we act, that enables us to dwell in him and he in us.

This is now the fourth time in this part of his biography that Jesus spoke of raising people up. This time he said that every man who ate his flesh and drank his blood has eternal life, and he would raise him up in the last day, the last day this world exists.

Notice again how Jesus told of the superiority of the Father, saying that the living Father sent him, and he lives because of the Father. He called God the living Father because earthly fathers always perish, but God is always living.

Regarding the matter of literally eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood, the Catholics teach the fantastic doctrine that whenever they partake of what they call the Eucharist they literally do eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood. Their Eucharist is what we call the Lord's supper or the Lord's communion that we observe as a memorial of his great sacrifice for us, which is what he commanded. The Catholics claim the bread and fruit of the grapevine change literally into his flesh and blood. They call that process the transubstantiation.

But what are the facts? Jesus instituted that simple ritual at the last supper with his apostles. Here is the record that Matthew gave of it: **“And as they were eating, Jesus, having taken bread, having expressed thanks, broke in pieces, and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And having taken the cup, having expressed thanks, he gave to them, saying, All ye drink of it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for remission of sins”** (Matthew 26:26-28). And the record in Luke says, **“And after taking bread, having expressed thanks, he broke in pieces, and gave to them, saying, This is my body that is given for you. Do ye this in my memory. Likewise also the cup after dining, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood being shed for you”** (Luke 22:19-20).

Jesus and his apostles were eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the grapevine during their observance of the Passover. They ate literal bread and they drank literal fruit of the grape vine, and nothing was either said or done that indicates any such thing as transubstantiation. That ridiculous doctrine of the Eucharist is further evidence that the Catholic church is a false one, filled with foolish doctrines leading souls astray.

In a synagogue in Capernaum

- **He said these things in a synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum** (John 6:59).

Remember, the text says that the multitude went to Capernaum to seek him the day after he fed the five thousand men. However, the above passage says that Jesus spoke those things at a synagogue in Capernaum. How many of those five thousand men followed him to Capernaum is not told. If there was still a large multitude with him, then most of them must have waited for him outside. Those in the synagogue were probably his disciples, who were always a small minority in the multitudes that followed him.

A hard saying

- **Therefore many of his disciples having heard, said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples are grumbling about this, said to them, Does this cause you to stumble? Then if ye should see the Son of man ascending where he was before?** (John 6:60-62).

That was indeed a hard saying for those who did not understand. And many of his disciples wondered how anybody could believe such words. They were offended by what he said, and that caused them to stumble in their faith about him. Jesus knew those disciples were grumbling about what he said. Remember how the Jews murmured about him when he said he was bread from heaven: **“The Jews therefore murmured about him because he said, I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”**

Murmuring and grumbling about the word of God is common among those who have no genuine love for him. And lack of love causes a lack of faith. We will never be able to understand everything about God. But we who love him, his truth, and his righteousness, still believe and trust him. For what we can see and understand is more than sufficient for us to love him and believe in him.

Jesus rebuked those disciples because they stumbled over his words. And he asked them, **“Then if ye should see the Son of man ascending where he was before?”** However, it is not clear what he meant by that question. Perhaps he was wondering if even a mighty sign like seeing him ascend into heaven would cause them to accept what he said. We who love him, his truth, and his righteousness do not need such signs to accept his words, regardless of what he says. We simply strive to understand them as we are able.

His words were about spirit

- **It is the spirit that makes alive. The flesh benefits nothing. The sayings that I speak to you are spirit, are life** (John 6:63).

Jesus still tried to help those disciples understand, because he is longsuffering and does not want any of us to be lost. Therefore, Jesus told them plainly that the words he spoke to them were figurative. His words referred to spiritual things, not to things of the flesh. There is no salvation in the flesh; it benefits nothing. The Catholics who believe in transubstantiation ought to read what Jesus said: **“The flesh benefits nothing.”** But their leaders do not want them to read the Bible; it exposes them as false.

Jesus had said several times they needed to eat his flesh for eternal life. Yet now he said that the flesh benefits nothing. That was to show them there were two different meanings about eating and drinking: a literal meaning and a figurative meaning. What Jesus applied to himself was the figurative meaning.

If they had accepted his explanation that the sayings he gave them were spirit and life, not of the flesh, then they would have been able to understand. Nevertheless, they were slow to understand, and most of them never did.

Jesus knew some would not believe

- **Nevertheless, there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning who they are who do not believe, and who he is who will betray him** (John 6:64).

Although Jesus tried to help them understand what he was saying, he told them plainly there were some of them who did not believe. Even though they were his disciples, some of them still did not believe in him. Remember, the rulers of the Jews did not believe in him, nor did most of the people. Even some who claimed to be his disciples did not believe in him.

Jesus knew all of that. Indeed, the passage says that he knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe. He even knew who was going to betray him. He knew all those things from the beginning of his ministry. Although Jesus was always disappointed by their unbelief, he was never surprised by it. That is one reason he had so much love for those who were his genuine disciples, those who truly did believe in him.

God and Christ both have feelings similar to those we have. They experience sorrow and disappointment similar to what we experience. You cannot read the Bible with open eyes without seeing those things, because there are numerous examples. Remember, we are made in God's image.

One example is the desire Jesus had for the fellowship of his apostles, as shown in these words: **“With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before my suffering”** (Luke 22:15). He loved them deeply because they truly believed in him, and he wanted them to be with him in heaven. For he said to them, **“In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will take you along to myself, so that where I am, ye may be also”** (John 14:2-3). And those words express his feelings about every faithful disciple, every one who will take up his cross and follow him, proving that he is a genuine disciple.

Who is able to come to him

- **And he said, Because of this I have said to you that no man is able to come to me, if it is not given to him from my Father** (John 6:65).

God knows the hearts of every man. And he knows who are worthy of salvation. God does not want the unworthy to believe in Christ; he does not want them to understand; he does not want them to have salvation. Remember what Jesus said when his disciples asked him why he spoke to the multitudes in parables: **“And having answered, he said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him.”**

“Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them.”

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:10-16).

Therefore, no man is able to come to Christ, if it is not given to him from the Father. Remember however, every man chooses for himself what kind of spirit he will have. Every man chooses for himself whether he will be worthy of the salvation of Christ, because God is not partial. God gives us the ability to believe in Christ, if we make ourselves worthy of him.

Many disciples went from him

- **From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him** (John 6:66).

I have no doubt that Jesus knew that would happen. The multitudes that followed him were filled with people who had no interest in becoming a serious disciple. They were there for the excitement of the crowds, for the food that was available, to see the spectacle

of miraculous healings, and for other wrongful reasons. Moreover, there were many of his disciples that did not believe in him.

Jesus never sought to have a large following just for the sake of having large numbers. He always sought quality over quantity. That approach to evangelism is rarely done anymore. It is much more common for men to compromise in order to attract more followers, and they fail to teach the hard things about the good news of Christ.

The effect of all the things that Jesus said, about himself being the bread that came down out of heaven, was to “prune away the dead wood.” It succeeded in driving away those who were unworthy of him. And in that way it strengthened his following. Those few who remained his disciples could have greater trust in each other.

Peter was swift to confess in him

- **Jesus said therefore to the twelve, Do ye not also want to go? Simon Peter therefore answered him, Lord, to whom will we go? Thou have sayings of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**
- **Jesus answered them, Did I not choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil? But he spoke of Judas Iscariot son of Simon. For this man, being one of the twelve, was going to betray him (John 6:67-71).**

Apparently most of his disciples went back and walked no more with him, because he asked his apostles if they did not also want to go. Peter replied by confessing their faith in Jesus. He said there was nobody else they could follow, because Jesus had the sayings of eternal life. Jesus’ sayings of eternal life were the teachings of his good news of our salvation. Those teachings show us the way of eternal life.

And Peter also testified that he and the other apostles both believed and knew that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. When the evidence about something we believe becomes overwhelming and conclusive, then that belief becomes knowledge to us. For example, belief in the evolution of species is so strong in many scientists that they claim it is a fact. The truth is, it is a great delusion.

Paul told about the force of delusion when he spoke of the “... **working of Satan with all power and signs and marvels of deceit, and in all deception of unrighteousness in those who are perishing, in return for which, they did not accept the love of the truth in order for them to be saved. And because of this God will send them the force of a delusion, for them to believe a lie, so that they might be condemned—all those who did not believe the truth, but who delighted in unrighteousness**” (Second Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Evolution is truly a delusion, but Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God. For the evidence in support of the belief in Jesus, as the Son of the living God, is overwhelming and conclusive. It was to his apostles, and it is to me and to many others. From my many studies of the word of God and the testimonies about Jesus in the Bible, I too have reached the point where I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and I also know that evo-

lution is a delusion. Of his apostles, only Judas Iscariot did not believe in him. He did not believe because he loved sin and wickedness.

Peter was always the most outspoken supporter of Jesus, being full of zeal for him. And Jesus rewarded his zeal, except when he would dispute him. Those few occasions when Peter did dispute Jesus, however, were also because of Peter's zeal for him. But in those cases it was a misguided zeal.

Notice how Jesus referred to Judas Iscariot as a devil. Satan is also called *the* devil. A devil is an evil adversary, although the literal meaning of the Greek word for devil is slanderer and false accuser. Slandering and falsely accusing is certainly evil opposition to someone. There is no record that Judas slandered Jesus, but he was certainly an evil adversary who betrayed him to the rulers of the Jews. And any man who makes himself an evil adversary of God and Christ is a devil.

The Jews sought to kill Jesus

- **And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for he did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him** (John 7:1).

It was not long in the ministry of Jesus that the Jews began to oppose him. And the time came when they even wanted to destroy him. However, there was never a convenient time for them, because of their fear of the multitudes who considered him a prophet. That is why they rejoiced when Judas later agreed to betray him.

The Jews not only opposed and persecuted Jesus Christ the Son of God, but they also opposed and persecuted the early church, the kingdom of God. The rulers of the Jews would have been much more aggressive against Jesus if it were not for the restrictions of the Romans, and for their fear of his followers. The Jews and their rulers were that way because they had become so wicked and spiritually decadent. And Jesus exposed and rebuked them because of it.

The feast of tabernacles

- **Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was near** (John 7:2).

The feast of tabernacles was called that because the people were required to live in tents or huts or booths for seven days. That was to remind them how they lived that way between the time they departed Egypt and the time they entered into their promised land.

Here is the passage in the law of Moses about the feast of tabernacles: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles for seven days to Jehovah. ... [Other details are given here.] ... Ye shall dwell in booths seven days. All who are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the sons of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God”** (Leviticus 23:33-43).

His own brothers did not believe

- **His brothers therefore said to him, Depart from here, and go into Judea so that thy disciples also may see thy works that thou do. For no man does anything in secret, and he himself seeks to be in public. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For not even his brothers believed in him (John 7:3-5).**

Mary had several other children after she bore Jesus. And they were all reared together with him. Jesus lived such a humble and unassuming life before his ministry, that even his brothers did not believe he was the promised Messiah. They apparently knew about the healings and other wonders he had been doing in Galilee. And it has been suggested that the advice his brothers gave him was to make himself more broadly known if he was really the Messiah.

Remember, the Jews expected the Messiah to be a mighty warrior-king. And Jesus was nothing like that. Perhaps his brothers were saying to him that if he wanted to prove he was the Messiah he should be that way. He should show himself to the world.

Why the world hates Jesus

- **Jesus therefore says to them, My time is not yet here, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil. Go ye up to this feast. I am not yet going to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled (John 7:6-8).**

When Jesus said the world could not hate them, he meant the world could not hate their unbelief. Since Satan is ruler of the world, then the world is not going to reject anyone's lack of faith in Jesus.

Jesus said the world hates him because he testifies about it that its works are evil. And truly any man who knows much about the word of God can see how the world is filled with evil works, and how much the world loves evil. Consequently, as faithful Christians who proclaim Jesus, we too are going to be hated by the world. It is part of our required suffering with him. As Paul said, **"The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly"** (Romans 8:16-17).

What Jesus meant by his time not yet being fulfilled means it was not time for him to be crucified and ascend back to heaven. He still had too many works yet to complete, too much yet to teach and to demonstrate, and too many more people to preach to.

Jesus goes to the feast in private

- **And having said these things to them, he remained in Galilee. But when his brothers went up, then he also went up to the feast, not openly, but as in private (John 7:9-10).**

Although the passage says that he went as in private, there is little doubt he was accompanied by some of his faithful disciples. He apparently did not want to draw a lot of attention to his arrival that time. Perhaps it was because the Jews sought to kill him, and by going as in private that confused them. That may have made them wonder about him, whether he was enough of a threat to them to risk the wrath of his disciples by arresting him.

The Bible record does tell of the time when Jesus made a grand entrance into Jerusalem, accompanied by many disciples who created a parade of celebration for him (see, for example, Matthew 21). That was when his time was finally fulfilled and he allowed himself to be crucified.

The multitudes were divided about him

- **The Jews therefore sought him at the feast, and said, Where is that man? And there was much murmuring among the multitudes about him. Some said, He is a good man, others said, No, but he leads the multitude astray. Yet no man spoke openly about him because of fear of the Jews (John 7:11-13).**

The world has always been divided about Jesus. Some proclaim his goodness, while others say he is a deceiver, leading people astray. A simple search on the internet will quickly reveal some of that division of opinion about him, much of which is very intense.

Remember what Jesus said about himself: **“Do ye suppose that I came to give peace on the earth? I tell you, no, but rather division. For henceforth there will be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. A father will be divided against a son, and a son against a father, a mother against a daughter, and a daughter against a mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”** (Luke 12:51-53).

Therefore, be not dismayed about such division. God is testing our souls, to find those who are worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

Notice how the passage says the people feared the Jews if they spoke openly about him. The great majority of the Jews rejected Jesus, and their rulers wanted to destroy him. Fear of speaking openly about God and Christ is now very wide spread in this evil generation of Americans. Even the mention of their names in our schools and other public institutions is forbidden. Those employed there risk losing their jobs if they do.

The source of Jesus' doctrine

- **And when it was now in the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, How does this man know scholarly material, not having learned?**
- **Jesus therefore answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me. If any man wants to do his will, he will know about the doctrine, whether it is from God, or I speak from myself (John 7:14-17).**

The people marveled because they knew that Jesus never had any formal education. They wondered how he could have such knowledge. Jesus used the opportunity to again teach them the doctrine was not his, but his who sent him, meaning God the Father.

Jesus always honored God the Father above himself, and he still does in heaven. For in his heavenly glory he said to his faithful disciples in Sardis, **“He who overcomes, this man will be clothed in white garments, and I will, no, not erase his name out of the book of life. And I will acknowledge his name before my Father, and before his agents”** (Revelation 3:5). Even in heaven God is still the Father of Jesus the Son of God. The trinity theory is false, foolish, irrational, and a stumbling block to developing faith in him.

Notice again Jesus told how those who really want to obey God will know whether Jesus’ doctrine is from God or not. They will know that Jesus’ doctrine is from God because he taught truth and righteousness, and the way he lived proved it. Therefore, any man who wants to do the will of God, which means to live righteously, will know from Jesus’ doctrine that it is truly from God. His doctrine promotes all that is good and right and just, and there is nothing evil in it.

For Paul said about it, **“Concerning all things presenting thyself a pattern of good works in the doctrine: incorruption, dignity, incorruptibility, sound speech, irreproachable, so that the man of opposition may be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us”** (Titus 2:7-8).

But remember, his doctrine is now learned only from the testimony in the New Testament. For Paul also said, **“But even if we, or an agent from heaven, should preach a good news to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, I now also say again, if any man preaches a good news to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed”** (Galatians 1:8-9). Therefore, every man who proclaims a doctrine of Christ that is not taught in the New Testament is under a curse from God.

Jesus did not seek his own glory

- **He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him, this man is true, and unrighteousness is not in him** (John 7:18).

Men speak and write their own thoughts and ideas so they can receive praise and honor from other men. Jesus sought the praise and honor of God the Father who sent him. Jesus did not seek his own glory; he trusted God the Father to glorify him. As Jesus later said to the Jews who did not believe in him, **“If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. My Father is he who glorifies me, of whom ye say, He is our God”** (John 8:54). Jesus, who sought not his own glory but the glory of him who sent him, was always righteous, faithful, and true.

And there was never any unrighteousness in him. His enemies among the Jews sought desperately to find something against him, but they always failed. In their desperation they made many false accusations against him, but he always proved they were wrong. But they killed him anyway because he exposed and condemned their own evils. All who love truth and righteousness love Jesus, but all who love evil and deceit hate him.

None of them kept the law

- **Did not Moses give you the law, and none of you does the law? Why do ye seek to kill me? The multitude answered and said, Thou have a demon. Who seeks to kill thee?** (John 7:19-20).

The unbelieving Jews who opposed Jesus claimed to obey the law of Moses. However, Jesus knew they were hypocrites, because none of them were completely faithful to it. Peter admitted the failure of the people to obey all of the laws. He told of that when he was opposing those who wanted to require the Gentile Christians to obey that law. He said to them, **“Now therefore why do ye challenge God, to place a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”** (Acts 15:10).

They were not able to bear all of the laws of Moses because God made it that way. Indeed, he made the world so that no man is able to live without sin; it is too difficult for all of us, especially when we are young. As Paul said, **“For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all. O the depth of wealth, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond finding out!”** (Romans 11:32-33).

Paul also told how the law was not able to save us: **“Is the law therefore against the promises of God? May it not happen! For if a law was given that could make alive, truly righteousness would be from law. But scripture confined all things under sin, so that the promise from faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”** (Galatians 3:21-22).

God **“confined all men in disobedience”** for at least three reasons: (1) so that no man could ever boast before him, (2) to prove the moral and spiritual superiority of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, because he did live without sin, and (3) **“so that he might be merciful to all.”** He is merciful to all who will accept the saving redemption of his Son Jesus Christ. I speak much more about those things in my books *The law of God before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus knew that his enemies wanted to kill him, and he asked them why. If they had answered truthfully, they would have exposed themselves as being evil men. If they had answered deceitfully, he would have exposed them as liars. Therefore, they would not answer. Instead, the multitude accused Jesus of being demon possessed because he asked that question.

Nevertheless, some of the people did know that their rulers wanted to kill him, because a few passages farther on the record says, **“Therefore some of the Jerusalemites said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? And lo, he speaks in public, and they say nothing to him. Perhaps the rulers really know that this really is the Christ?”** (John 7:25-26).

Jesus defends healing on the sabbath

- **Jesus answered and said to them, I did one work, and ye all marvel because of this. Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and ye circumcise a man on a sabbath.**

- **If a man receives circumcision on a sabbath, so that the law of Moses may not be loosed, are ye angry with me because I made a man entirely well on a sabbath? Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment** (John 7:21-24).

Jesus made those comments in response to being condemned for healing on the sabbath. He justified what he was doing by giving the example of circumcision being done on the sabbath, and that was never condemned. (He also gave other examples at other times when he was criticized about the sabbath, such as what he said in Matthew 12:3-5). Jesus showed them how it was illogical for them to accept circumcision on the sabbath in obedience to the law that it be done on the eighth day after birth (see Leviticus 12:3), but then to condemn healing on the sabbath.

It was illogical because circumcision made their children acceptable before God. For Jehovah said to their forefather Abraham when he first gave the command about circumcision, **“He who is born in thy house, and he who is bought with thy money, must be circumcised. And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant”** (Genesis 17:13-14). And restoring a man’s health was also making him acceptable, because unhealthy men were considered unclean, and were forbidden to enter the temple area.

Indeed, the law says that even priests who were malformed in any way could not serve in the temple, even if they were otherwise healthy: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron, saying, Whoever he is of thy seed throughout their generations who has a blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatever man he is who has a blemish, he shall not approach: not a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a flat nose, or anything superfluous, or a man who is broken-footed, or broken-handed, or crook-backed, or a dwarf, or who has a blemish in his eye, or is scurvy, or scabbed, or has his testicles broken.**

“No man of the seed of Aaron the priest, who has a blemish, shall come near to offer the offerings of Jehovah made by fire; he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy, only he shall not go in to the veil, nor come near to the altar, because he has a blemish, that he not profane my sanctuaries, for I am Jehovah who sanctifies them” (Leviticus 21:16-23).

When Jesus said that he did one work and they all marveled, he did not mean he only did one work of healing. He meant all it took was for him to do a single work of healing to cause them all to marvel.

The last sentence about judging is a proverb full of wisdom and truth. For the wisest judgments are not based merely upon appearances or upon the superficial aspects of a situation. We are never to judge carelessly. We must judge righteous judgment, making judgments that are fair and just. Here is a similar proverb from Solomon: **“He who pleads his case first seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out”** (Proverbs 18:17).

Jesus was very controversial

- **Therefore some of the Jerusalemites said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? And lo, he speaks in public, and they say nothing to him. Perhaps the rulers really know that this really is the Christ? (John 7:25-26).**

Remember, the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, which is why he had been in Galilee: **“And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for he did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him”** (John 7:1). The Jews who wanted to kill Jesus included their rulers, because Luke said, **“And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, and the scholars sought to destroy him, even the foremost men of the people”** (Luke 19:47).

It was known by some of the citizens of Jerusalem that the rulers wanted to kill Jesus, which is why the people were surprised he was there and speaking openly in public. Some of the people of Jerusalem explained why Jesus was allowed to speak openly, by suggesting the rulers really did know that he was the Christ. Those people apparently recognized that Jesus was the Christ, and they thought perhaps the rulers also knew he was.

But the rulers never did believe in him. The people did not realize how fearful their rulers were of them, because that was the main reason the rulers did not molest him there: **“And the scholars and the chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him, for they feared him, because all the people were awed at his doctrine”** (Mark 11:18). And that is why Judas sought a favorable time to betray him: **“And from that time he [Judas] sought a favorable opportunity so that he might betray him”** (Matthew 26:16). That is why Judas chose to have Jesus arrested outside the city in the middle of the night.

Knowing where he is from

- **However we know this man, where he is from, but when the Christ comes, no man knows where he is from (John 7:27).**

Apparently some kind of myth had developed that said no man would know where Christ would be from. And that myth was a stumbling block that led many astray about Jesus. Over the centuries the Jews have created many myths about God, and many myths have been created about Christ. Beware of all myths about God and Christ. Study the Bible (a faithful translation if you cannot read the original languages) to learn the truth about them.

Nevertheless, the Jews did know where the Christ would be born. Remember what the chief priests and scholars said when Herod asked where the Christ would be born (see Matthew 2:4-5). They told him Bethlehem, and they quoted this passage about it from the prophet Micah: **“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which are little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee he shall come forth to me who is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”** (Micah 5:2).

Moreover, a passage a little farther on says, **“Many from the multitude therefore, when they heard the saying, said, This is truly the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. Others said, For does the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”** (John 7:40-42)

Knowing about God and Jesus

- **Jesus therefore cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, Ye both know me, and know where I am from? And I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, whom ye know not. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me** (John 7:28-31).

Jesus knew that some of the people were denying him because of that myth. Instead of attacking the myth, he challenged them about knowing him and where he was from. He used that occasion to remind them about where he was truly from and who sent him. For he had earlier told them plainly that he came down from heaven to do the will of the Father who sent him: **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and he who comes to me I will, no, not cast out. Because I have come down from heaven, not so that I might do my will, but the will of him who sent me”** (John 6:37-38).

And again he denied coming of himself. He always said he was sent by God. He never claimed equality with God the Father. And he always praised him, this time saying that God was true. For God is the source of all truth, and he personifies it. He is the very antithesis of everything false and deceitful.

Jesus knew the people really did not know God. Just as with most people in the world, they had many ideas about God, but most of them were false. They knew he existed, but they did not know what he was really like. Otherwise they would have recognized God in Jesus. And even now most people would not recognize Christ if he came into the world the way he did then, because they have created a mythical christ they prefer to believe in.

They prefer to think of him as an effeminate man who had long shaggy hair, loved everybody, and taught pacifism. The true Jesus as revealed in the holy scriptures of the Bible is the very opposite.

Jesus knows God because he came from him, and God sent him. Who better knows someone than he who lived with him? And again Jesus said that it was God who sent him. Jesus was sent by him; he did not come of himself. Jesus always confessed being subordinate to God the Father.

Wanting but failing to seize him

- **They sought therefore to seize him, and yet no man laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come** (John 7:31).

Several times the Bible tells how some men sought to seize him, but they were never able because **“his hour had not yet come.”** That means God always prevented it from happening until his mission was completed and it was time for him to depart this world. And nothing can happen to anybody unless God permits it. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father”** (Matthew 10:29).

Many from the crowd believed in him

- **But many from the crowd believed in him, and they said, When the Christ comes, will he do more signs than these that this man did? (John 7:31).**

Those who believed in him defended their faith by mentioning the evidence of the signs he did. He had healed many seriously infirm souls, he had driven out demons from those possessed by them, and he had fed thousands with just a few loaves of bread and fishes. The evidence that God was with him was overwhelming. And it was more than enough to develop faith in him. Those who would not believe in him did so in spite of those mighty signs. Such men do not want to believe in him because they hate what he teaches.

Sending to take him

- **The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things about him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent subordinates so that they might take him (John 7:32).**

Remember, some of the people knew that the rulers of the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, because the earlier passage said, **“Therefore some of the Jerusalemites said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? And lo, he speaks in public, and they say nothing to him”** (John 7:25). However, none of them did anything to him, because another passage said, **“They sought therefore to seize him, and yet no man laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come”** (John 7:30).

Nevertheless, the Pharisees and the chief priests, having heard the crowd murmuring those things about him, whether he was the Christ or not, they sent men to arrest him. The murmuring of the crowd about him apparently made the rulers much bolder in their desire to destroy him. And because he was so controversial among the people, they were more confident to send subordinates to arrest him.

Could not go where he was going

- **Jesus therefore said, Yet a little time I am with you, and then I go to him who sent me. Ye will seek me, and will not find me, and where I am, ye cannot come.**
- **The Jews therefore said among themselves, Where is this man going to go that we will not find him? Is he going to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What is this word that he said, Ye will seek me, and will not find me, and, Where I am, ye cannot come? (John 7:33-36).**

That was another riddle that Jesus spoke to the people. They were mystified about it, and it added to the controversy about him. When he said he was going to the one who sent him and they could not go there, he was, of course, referring to God in heaven.

Speaking in riddles was probably one way of testing people. For worthy souls seek to find the answers to his riddles to increase their understanding. While unworthy souls scoff, dis-

miss them as nonsense, and remain in their ignorance. As many of the Jews said of him, **“He has a demon, and is mad. Why do ye listen to him?”** (John 10:20).

It is an enduring fact that the more carefully those with righteous hearts examine him and his words, the more convinced they are about the truth of what he said. Those with corrupted hearts either ignore his words, or they distort and falsify them to justify themselves. They distort and falsify his words because they hate truth. The truly diabolical ones seek only to destroy faith in him and his teaching. That was what the Pharisees were like. Those things are well illustrated in the passages farther on.

The Dispersion among the Greeks refers to the many Israelites who had been scattered among the Gentile nations (which they called the Greeks) after their country had been destroyed centuries earlier; ten tribes of Israel were destroyed first by the Assyrians, and then Judah (including Benjamin) was later destroyed by the Babylonians. The peoples of foreign countries (foreign to the Jews) were probably called Greeks because Greek was the international language of that time, as English now is during our time. Hence, to a Jew all Gentiles were called Greeks.

Living water flowing from us

- **Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus had stood and cried out, saying, If any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water. But he spoke this about the Spirit that those who believe in him were going to receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified** (John 7:37-39).

Jesus came into this world to save our souls. But that is only possible if we believe and obey him. Jesus was glorified when he endured all the trials and temptations of this life without sin. His greatest trial was his betrayal and crucifixion. And after he was resurrected and ascended into heaven, he sat down at the right hand of God and was given the right to redeem all who belong to him.

And that redemption occurs when we are begotten again through the rite of immersion in water for the remission of our sins. And when that happens we receive the Holy Spirit. For Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). That gift is to have the Holy Spirit reside within us like living water.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit another helper for them. For he said to his apostles at the last supper, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17).

The scripture that Jesus mentioned about the Holy Spirit being a river of living water may be this one: **“Thus says Jehovah who made thee, and formed thee from the womb, who will help thee: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him who is thirsty, and streams upon the dry**

ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isaiah 44:2-3).

The Holy Spirit is like living water in us for at least two reasons. First, it is the source of our knowledge about his good news of salvation. It is the source because it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the word of God was proclaimed and written. Second, the Holy Spirit helps energize us to live the way Jesus did. The Holy Spirit is like energy in our enlightened conscience, arousing us to promote truth and righteousness.

However, the gift of the Holy Spirit was not given until after Jesus was glorified and ascended back to heaven. Jesus was glorified at the completion of his sinless life in this world, which proved his moral and spiritual superiority over all others, and earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who believe and obey him.

I speak much more about those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The controversy about him continued

- **Many from the multitude therefore, when they heard the saying, said, This is truly the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. Others said, For does the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?**
- **So there became a division among the multitude because of him. And some of them wanted to take him, but no man laid hands on him** (John 7:40-44).

That passage shows the degree of controversy and division there was about him. There was controversy among the people not only about Jesus but also about Christ himself. For remember what some of them earlier said about Jesus and Christ: **“However we know this man, where he is from, but when the Christ comes, no man knows where he is from”** (John 7:27). And now some of them said, **“Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”**

Notice how the unbelievers among them were misled by their lack of knowledge and understanding. Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem of Judah, but it was commonly believed that he was born in Galilee where he was raised. And obviously the unbelievers were not interested in confirming the truth. They accepted the common idea because it justified their lack of faith in him.

Such things are typical of many people. They have an attitude that says, “I am satisfied with what I believe, so do not trouble me with facts.” Such self-delusion is easy for things that are immediately satisfying and are only threatening for the future. Most sin is that way.

The text says that again some of them wanted to arrest him, but none of them did. None of them did because his time was not yet; he had not yet preached to enough of the people of Israel.

No man ever spoke like Jesus

- **The subordinates therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees. And those men said to them, Why did ye not bring him? The subordinates answered, A man never so spoke like this man (John 7:45).**

That is another example of how men with different character of their spirits perceive and respond differently to the same thing. What Jesus spoke were things that were exceedingly extraordinary and very powerful. Those subordinates were awed by the words of Jesus, but the chief priests and Pharisees were repelled by them.

Those humble subordinates had not been so blinded and hardened in their hearts as the chief priests and Pharisees were. Consequently, they were properly astonished by Jesus' words. They were so astonished that they were even disobedient to those rulers who sent them, and they did not arrest him.

Those rulers were self-righteous and blind

- **The Pharisees therefore answered them, Have ye not also been led astray? Have any of the rulers believed in him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude that does not know the law are accursed (John 7:47-49).**

Notice how those rulers justified rejecting Jesus by saying that none of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in him. And they said the multitude that did believe in him were ignorant of the law and accursed. The truth is that those who believed in Jesus were blessed, and they were wiser about God's will than all those rulers.

Consider what the prophet Micah said about pleasing God: **"With what shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown thee, O man, what is good. And what does Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"** (Micah 6:6-8).

Dear reader, do not blindly accept the judgment of rulers and dominant religious leaders when they reject someone and his words. It happened to Jesus and it will happen to every man who seeks to promote the truth of the word of God. Therefore, you are obligated to search the scriptures for yourself to verify what is said. Use the Bible standard to judge for yourself. You cannot blame other men when you stand before Christ to be judged, not when you have the word of God so freely available for yourself in these modern times.

Nicodemus tries to reason with them

- **Nicodemus says to them (he who came to him by night, being one of them), Does our law judge a man, unless it first may hear from himself and know what he does? They answered and said to him, Are thou also from Galilee?**

Search and see, that out of Galilee arises no prophet. And each man went to his house (John 7:50-53).

Nicodemus had earlier said to Jesus, **“Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him”** (John 3:2). However, when Nicodemus said those things it was after he came to him by night. Obviously, therefore, he had not publicly confessed his faith in him. If he had confessed him he would no doubt have been rejected by the other Pharisees, because they excommunicated from the synagogue every man who confessed in Jesus (see John 9:22).

Those men also claimed that out of Galilee arises no prophet. Yet both Jonah and Isaiah had been from Galilee. What they probably meant by a prophet was the promised Messiah, because he was to be born in Bethlehem. Those chief priests and Pharisees believed like most of the people that Jesus was born where he was raised, which was in Galilee. Their ignorance helped to justify to themselves their opposition to Jesus.

Judging the woman caught in adultery

- **But Jesus went to the mount of Olives. And at early morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came to him. And having sat down, he taught them. And the scholars and the Pharisees bring to him a woman taken in adultery.**
- **And having stood her in the midst, tempting, they say to him, Teacher, we found this woman committing adultery, in the act. Now in the law, Moses commanded us such women are to be stoned. What therefore do thou say about her? But they said this, trying him, so that they might have an accusation against him. But Jesus having stooped down, wrote on the ground with his finger, not pretending.**
- **And when they continued asking him, after standing erect, he said to them, Let the innocent man of you first cast the stone at her. And again having stooped down, he wrote on the ground. And they, having heard and being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, having begun from the elder until the last. And Jesus was left behind alone, and the woman being in the midst (John 8:1-9).**

Bringing that woman to him was another example of how the scholars and Pharisees tried to trap Jesus. For if he told them to stone the woman, he could have been guilty of failing to get permission from the Romans for capital punishment. Remember, the Romans were their supreme rulers. On the other hand, if Jesus told them not to stone her, then he would be saying to disobey the law of Moses. Thus, they thought he was trapped.

Jesus gave them plenty of time to keep demanding a response from him. He even seemed to be avoiding them. And no doubt the longer he delayed that way the more confident they were of victory over him. However, as with the question of paying taxes to Caesar, all it took was a single comment from him to deflate their arrogance and defeat them.

When Jesus said the innocent man among them should first cast the stone at her, he did not mean a sinless man. He meant the man among them who had never committed adultery. For Jesus knew their hearts. And he knew they were all guilty; they simply had not been caught the way the woman had been. Notice how the elder ones among them were the first to withdraw. For they had lived longer and accumulated more guilt that way.

The trap they set for Jesus sprang against them. As the psalmist said, **“Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass over”** (Psalm 141:10). They were truly trapped in their own net. For they knew that this story would become widely known. And if any of them had cast the first stone he would have been subjected to great scrutiny and eventually exposed. And that man’s name would have become a proverb and a byword.

That was no doubt another reason why the elder ones among them were the first to leave. For they knew that would happen if they claimed innocence. Thus, they shrank back like the cowardly hypocrites they were. And the younger ones among them followed.

Jesus forgave her

- **And Jesus, after standing erect, and having seen no man but the woman, he said to her, Woman, where are those accusers of thee? Did no man condemn thee? And she said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and henceforth sin no more** (John 8:10-11).

Jesus was fully justified to forgive her, because centuries before, Jehovah had said to the sons of Israel, **“I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery. For themselves go apart with harlots, and they sacrifice with the prostitutes. And the people who do not understand shall be overthrown”** (Hosea 4:14).

When the people are righteous, then the guilty should be properly punished. However, in this unjust world, when all the people of a particular society are guilty, then only those who are caught are punished. And God will have no part in that kind of perverted justice. As the prophet Hosea reported, when all the men of Israel had been guilty, Jehovah would not punish their women who sinned against them. Instead, he would overthrow them all. And that is what happened to that sinful generation of Jews who rejected the Son of God.

Jesus the light of the world

- **Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows me would, no, not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life** (John 8:12).

The people who saw that encounter could not have helped being impressed by his wisdom. Therefore, he used that occasion to teach them why he had such wisdom; he had it because he is the light of the world. And he enlightens every man who follows him.

Remember, light symbolizes knowledge of truth, while darkness symbolizes ignorance. Jesus was telling the people how vitally important it is to hearken to him. For it is only through the word of God that we can have light about the world, such as knowledge about

its true nature and why it exists. And it is only through knowledge of Jesus Christ and his good news that we can find the way that leads to eternal life.

Testimony for Jesus

- **The Pharisees therefore said to him, Thou testify about thyself. Thy testimony is not valid.**
- **Jesus answered and said to them, Even if I might testify about myself, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I go, but ye do not know where I come from and where I go.**
- **Ye judge according to the flesh. I judge no man. But even if I judge, my judgment is valid, because I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent me. And also it is written in your law that the testimony of two men is valid. I am he who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me (John 8:13-18).**

Remember, the law of Moses commanded that only testimony given by two or more witnesses could be acceptable as valid. That is why the Jews said the testimony of Jesus was not valid (in the legal sense), because he was only one man. That law about two or more witnesses does not determine the truth about anything; it merely helps reduce false witnessing.

Therefore, Jesus assured them his testimony about himself was in fact valid. It was true and valid because of who he is. Whatever Jesus said was true and valid because he knew where he came from and where he was going; he knew he came from God and he knew he was going back to him. And since he came from God, then whatever he said was true and valid.

Jesus also reminded them that the Father was testifying about him. God was continually with Jesus and he testified about him through the mighty works of healing and other signs that Jesus did. Those things could only have come from the heavenly Father. Remember what Nicodemus said to Jesus: **“Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him”** (John 3:2).

Notice how Jesus tried to reason logically to persuade them. He was never purely dogmatic in demanding their faith and obedience. Their lack of faith in him was not because of logical reasoning. It was because they hated his words and his teachings.

Moreover, the Pharisees judged according to the flesh. They could not look beyond the physical appearance of Jesus. They could not see God in him through his words of righteousness and the mighty works he was doing. Therefore, they judged him as an ordinary man. But he was not an ordinary man, and he proved it by his actions.

When Jesus said he judged no man, he explained what he meant farther in the book: **“I have come a light into the world, so that every man who believes in me may not remain in the darkness. And if any man hears my sayings, and will not believe, I do not judge him, for I came not so that I might judge the world, but that I might save the world.**

“He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has that which judges him: the word that I spoke, that will judge him in the last day. Because I spoke not from myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:46-49).

Know Jesus, know his Father

- **They said therefore to him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither me, nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also (John 8:19).**

When the author of the book of Hebrews was comparing Jesus with God, he said that Jesus was **“the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence”** (Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, knowing Jesus is knowing God the heavenly Father. For Jesus is **“the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence.”** And now we know Jesus by studying the New Testament record and believing in him.

Sinners can speak about God, and they can learn things from the Bible about him, but they do not know him. They do not understand the spirit and the character of God. They only have some knowledge about superficial things. There is no depth to what they know about him. Therefore, they completely misunderstand who he is and what he is like. And that was also true of the knowledge the Pharisees had about Jesus. They completely misunderstood who he is and what he is like. For God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts because they were unworthy (see John 12:39-40).

Sinners cannot go where he was going

- **Jesus spoke these sayings in the treasury as he taught in the temple, and no man seized him, because his hour had not yet come. Jesus therefore again said to them, I go, and ye will seek me, and ye will die in your sin. Where I go, ye cannot come. The Jews therefore said, Will he kill himself, because he says, Where I go, ye cannot come? (John 8:20-22).**

Notice how the record says again that no man seized him because his hour had not yet come; it was not time for him to be betrayed and crucified. When Jesus said they would seek him, he was referring to their seeking for the Messiah, but they would seek in vain. And indeed, the great majority of Jews did continue to seek their Messiah in vain after Jesus returned to the Father.

The majority of Jews in modern times no longer seek him, because they do not even believe in God now. And those few who still believe in God (but deny Jesus) and hope for the promised Messiah still seek him in vain. And as Jesus said to those ancient Jews, unless they repent and believe in him they will die in their sins.

John tells farther on how Jesus also told his apostles that where he was going they could not come. But unlike what he said to the Jews, he also said to his apostles they would follow him afterwards. They would follow him afterwards because, unlike most of the Jews, they believed and obeyed him.

Here is that story: **“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, Where I go, ye cannot come, I also now say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other. By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other.**

“Simon Peter says to him, Lord, where do thou go? Jesus answered him, Where I go, thou cannot follow me now, but thou will follow me afterwards. Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thee” (John 13:33-37). That was when Jesus told Peter how he would deny him that very night.

Being from below and being from above

- **And he said to them, Ye are from below, I am from above. Ye are of this world, I am not of this world. I said therefore to you that ye will die in your sins. For unless ye believe that I am he, ye will die in your sins** (John 8:23-24).

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, begotten long before the world began. He is not of this world, for he and the Father are of heaven. Remember how John said at the beginning of this biography of Jesus that the world came through him. This world is going to perish. And every man will perish with it, unless he receives the salvation that only comes from faith in Christ. They will perish because of the condemnation of their sins. Our salvation is only through faith in Christ, because only he has the power to redeem us from that condemnation.

Jesus is the beginning

- **They said therefore to him, Who are thou? And Jesus said to them, The beginning, something that I am even telling you** (John 8:25).

Jesus sometimes spoke in riddles, and this is one of them. When he said he is the beginning, he meant he is the beginning of all things. Before time began there was only God the Father, because he has always existed; he had no beginning. But God wanted to share life, and so he planned how he was going to do it. The very first thing God did was to beget his Son, whom he then used to create all things. Therefore, Jesus is truly the beginning.

Jesus had been proving to them with his many miracles that he was the Son of God, which was how he was telling them he was the beginning. But they could not accept it. They were looking at him superficially. And he just did not seem to be a king of anything, much less the King of kings. They were blind to the vast superiority of his character and his spirit. Even his many miracles could not overcome their prejudice against his physical nature.

Speaking the word of God to them

- **I have many things to say and to judge about you. But he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world these things that I heard from him. They did not understand that he spoke the Father to them** (John 8:26-27).

The many things Jesus had to say and to judge about them probably refer to everything about his good news of salvation, which words were not completed until after he ascended into heaven. Jesus did not himself teach everything about the kingdom of God. He gave that responsibility to his apostles after he returned to the Father. And the message of his good news and the kingdom of God was only completed with the writings of the entire New Testament. Therefore, the words that he himself spoke are only part of his message and his judgments.

Jesus was telling them that the one who sent him was truly God, and he was proclaiming the things that God told him. However, instead of using the word God, he spoke of him as the Father, and he who sent him. Those were much more meaningful expressions than simply the word God, because they indicated his close relationship with God. Nevertheless, they still did not understand. Their eyes were blinded.

In the above passage Jesus referred to God as he who sent him, and he said that he who sent him was true. The word true means real, genuine, and factual. And not only is God real, genuine, and factual, but it was real, genuine, and factual that God sent Jesus.

And Jesus said he spoke to the world those things that he heard from him. Therefore, the words that Jesus was saying to them were true. And he spoke those things, not just to those Jews, but to the world, which was done through his apostles and his other disciples after his ascension back to heaven.

Knowing he was from God

- **Jesus therefore said to them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye will know that I am he, and I do nothing from myself, but I speak these things as my Father taught me** (John 8:28).

His being lifted up referred to his crucifixion. And it was only afterward that Jesus was recognized by a few of the Jews as being the Christ. (He has never been accepted by most of them.) That first happened on the day of Pentecost after his ascension into heaven. It was then that the people (those in and around the temple) saw the miracle of tongues and heard the first sermon by Peter (see Acts 2).

Notice again how Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man. He is both the Son of God and the Son of man. He was begotten both in heaven and upon the earth. And as the only begotten Son of God, having lived a sinless life in the flesh as a man, he became the perfect mediator between God and man.

And notice again how Jesus said he did nothing from himself, but he spoke those things as his Father taught him. Jesus fully confessed the superiority of God the Father. Moreover, Jesus said he was not speaking his own words, but those things that his Father taught him.

How then can men claim he was equal to the Father? The trinity doctrine is denied many times by the words of Jesus himself.

God was always with him

- **And he who sent me is with me. The Father has not left me alone, because I always do things pleasing to him** (John 8:29).

Although Jesus said he was going to be crucified, he wanted them to know that God was always with him. God was always with him, even on the cross. Because he said to his apostles just before his betrayal, **“Behold, the hour comes, and now has come, that ye will be scattered, each man to his own things, and ye will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me”** (John 16:32).

God was always with him, even on the cross when Jesus asked God why he had forsaken him (see Matthew 27:46). God forsook him to be crucified, but God was still with him, and Jesus knew it. Jesus only asked that question for our benefit, so that we would find the answer and learn how he became our Redeemer.

God himself commanded Jesus to endure that terrible ordeal so that Jesus could earn the right to save the souls of all who genuinely love God. God was always with Jesus because he was always obedient to him. He alone lived a sinless life of service to God as a man in the world. That proved his moral and spiritual superiority. And it earned him the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

Knowing the truth and being free

- **As he spoke these things of him, many believed in him. Jesus therefore said to those Jews who believed him, If ye remain in my word, ye are truly my disciples, and ye will know the truth, and the truth will make you free** (John 8:30-32).

Although most of the Jews did not understand him, many of them did believe in him. And to those who did believe he spoke another profound truth, one about truth itself. First he said that to be a true disciple they had to remain in his word, which means they had to faithfully obey his commandments.

Then he told them how truth would make them free. For the worse kind of bondage is the bondage of ignorance and error. Deceiving people and keeping them ignorant is how every tyrant keeps his people in bondage. That is why the devil and his disciples fight viciously against truth.

This deceived generation of Americans, who have forsaken God, worship freedom. And they think it is the source of our strength and prosperity. It is not. Freedom is simply a blessing from knowing truth. For Jesus said that **“ye will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”** Strength and prosperity come from righteousness. As Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

And righteousness comes from applying truth. Knowing truth gives us freedom, and with that freedom we can apply truth to create good things. That is how nations can become

exalted. But this generation of Americans has forsaken the truth of God, and so they are losing their freedoms, and are becoming more unrighteous and decadent. Few of them realize how many of their freedoms they have already lost to the growing powers and controls of their rulers.

In bondage to sin

- **They answered to him, We are Abraham's seed, and have been in bondage to no man, ever. How can thou say, Ye will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, that every man who does the sin is a bondman of the sin** (John 8:33-34).

They did not understand the deeper meaning of what Jesus was saying. They thought of freedom as simply not being in bondage to anyone. A man can be a complete slave without being in bondage to any man. For the worse kind of bondage is bondage to sin. It is even worse than bondage to ignorance. And there are many people who have put themselves in bondage to sin with their addictions.

Such people usually deceive themselves when they first begin, although occasionally they are simply misled. Nevertheless, as they progress it becomes increasingly difficult to free themselves. They become bondmen to their sinful practices. And their bad habits and addictions gradually bring misery to their lives and to the lives of many around them. I speak more about that in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

True freedom

- **And the bondman does not remain in the house into the age. The Son remains into the age. If therefore the Son should make you free, ye will truly be free** (John 8:35-36).

Remember, the expression "into the age, or "into the ages" generally means for a very long time or forever. A bondman does not belong in the house permanently but a son does. Jesus is the Son of God and belongs in heaven forever.

Jesus frees us from the condemnation caused by our sins by redeeming us from it. He also frees us from the bondage of ignorance by revealing the truth about God and his will for us. He also frees us from a legal system with God, allowing us to live by a law of liberty instead (see James 2:12). He frees us from every kind of bondage, and makes us children of God, enabling us to be in heaven with him as sons of God for eternity.

His word had no place in them

- **I know that ye are Abraham's seed, yet ye seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you** (John 8:37).

The word that Jesus spoke had no place in them because their hearts were perverted and unworthy. They could not endure what he was teaching. Therefore, they rejected and

opposed him. That is true of all unrepentant sinners; they cannot endure hearing the truth. Try teaching the truth of God and Christ to them and you will see.

The devil was their father

- **I speak what I have seen from my Father, and ye therefore do what ye have seen from your father. They answered and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus says to them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. Ye do the works of your father.**
- **They said therefore to him, We were not begotten from fornication. We have one Father, God. Therefore Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, ye would love me, for I came forth and have come from God. For, neither have I come for myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye cannot hear my word.**
- **Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father. He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it. And I, because I speak the truth, ye do not believe me (John 8:38-45).**

Those Jews claimed to have Abraham as their father. He was indeed the forefather of their race. But the devil was their father in their spiritual nature. For they thought and acted like him, instead of the faithful and righteous Abraham. Indeed, they wanted to do the devil's desires; they wanted to serve him. They wanted to serve him because they took pleasure in the evil of his ways.

The devil was a man-killer from the beginning when he tempted the innocent Eve to sin, thus causing her condemnation and death. He used deceit to tempt her. Jesus also said the devil was the father of lies. The devil was a very powerful creature in heaven, and apparently when he chose to compete with God and become his adversary he invented the stratagem of deceit. For Jesus said he was the father of lies. I speak much more about the devil in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

God cannot be deceived, but his offspring can be. Deception (in its many forms) is a very powerful weapon, and is used both in the animal world and in the human world. Virtually all unrepentant sinners use deceit in some kind of way, especially the wicked. And the most cunning of them use it very craftily.

I marvel every time I watch a story of fiction on TV. The producers of them give the impression that everyone lies, and they virtually always portray lying as either harmless or helpful. Since they contrive the stories they show, they can manipulate their fictitious reality to justify their lies.

However, the true reality we all live in is much different. Those entertainment liars glorify lying, and give the impression that only the naïve do not lie. Nevertheless, in the true reality lying is vicious and virtually always harmful.

The only defense against lying and deceit is truth and light, which is why sinners love darkness and they hate and oppose truth. The Jews did not believe Jesus, because he spoke truth, which they hated. They were deceivers who were themselves deceived. For Paul said, **“But evil men and impostors will go forward to worse, leading astray and being led astray”** (Second Timothy 3:13).

Notice again how Jesus emphasized that he came forth from God, and he was sent by him. He did not come into the world for himself. Jesus always put the Father first, and he told how he was subservient to the Father.

Jesus was sinless

- **Which of you convicts me about sin?** (John 8:46).

Jesus lived a completely sinless life. Consequently, nobody could ever convict him about sin. Later when the chief priests and the elders of the Jews finally arrested Jesus, they tried desperately to condemn him before Pilate the Roman governor, but they could not. The best they could do was to bring in a lot of false witnesses. But those witnesses kept contradicting themselves. Therefore, Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent.

The only way they could persuade Pilate to condemn Jesus was to threaten Pilate with Caesar’s wrath. Since Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews, then the chief priests and the elders said to Pilate, **“If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend. Every man who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar”** (John 19:12). Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. Nevertheless, he condemned him lest he himself be condemned by Caesar for releasing a man who claimed to be the king of the Jews.

Only those from God can hear him

- **And if I speak truth, why do ye not believe me? He who is of God hears the sayings of God. Because of this ye do not hear, because ye are not of God** (John 8:46-47).

Jesus said that if a man was of God then he would hear the sayings of God. And that was why those Jews could not hearken to what Jesus was saying. It was because they were not of God. A man who is of God loves that which is good and right and just. A man who is of God is humble and lowly in spirit, and is open-minded to hear the words of truth.

Remember the parable about the man sowing seed on different kinds of soil. The seed will only grow and bear fruit when the soil is good. And the word of God will only grow and bear fruit with the man whose heart is good. Those who are of God will hearken to his sayings, and will apply them to live righteously. The word of God cannot grow and bear fruit in the hearts of those who are not of God. The key to being receptive to the good news of Christ is the quality of a man’s heart. And every man determines that for himself.

Accused of being crazy

- **Therefore the Jews answered and said to him, Do we not say well that thou are a Samaritan, and have a demon? Jesus answered, I have no demon, but I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me. But I seek not my own glory. He is who seeks and judges (John 8:48-50).**

To use modern words, those Jews were accusing Jesus of being a crazy half-breed. They just could not understand him and his teachings, for their eyes were blinded and their hearts were hardened. They had made the “soil” of their hearts too bad for his words to grow and bear fruit.

Even though Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, whose spirit literally came from heaven, he was still very humble and lowly. He never sought his own glory, even when his own people dishonored him. He trusted that God would glorify him because of his obedience.

God seeks and judges by testing our souls. That is the primary reason for our existence here in this world of tribulation. God is harvesting souls to become his sons for eternity in heaven. And our lives in this world will prove our worthiness or unworthiness. God is seeking worthy souls to become his sons for eternity. Consequently, he judges who is worthy and who is not.

Therefore dear reader, strive with all your being to make yourself worthy of receiving his gift of eternal salvation. As Jesus said, **“For what does it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:26).

Never seeing death

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age (John 8:51).**

What Jesus said is literally true. And those words are marvelously encouraging, because only the most deranged minds do not dread death. For those who are faithful disciples of Christ, when our body of flesh fails and perishes, our divine spirit continues to live.

Our divine spirit is our true being, and we of the disciples of Christ will never see death. For we are totally unconscious in the sleep of death. Therefore, we will only be aware of being taken into heaven. In our consciousness it will seem to us that we are immediately taken after we die, even if it is centuries afterward.

Our spirit may sleep for thousands of years, but we will have no awareness of it. Our only awareness is from the instant our body perishes to the instant we are taken to heaven. Any time that passes between the death of our body and being taken to heaven will not be noticed. It will seem to be instantaneous. Therefore, take comfort in that promise Jesus made for us. For we who remain faithful to him will never see death. Our body of flesh will die, but we will not see it. All we will see is the eternal life Jesus will give us.

They accused him and he accused them

- **The Jews therefore said to him, Now we know that thou have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets, and thou say, If any man keeps my word, he will, no, not taste of death, into the age. Are thou greater than our father Abraham who died? And the prophets died. Who do thou make thyself?**
- **Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. My Father is he who glorifies me, of whom ye say, He is our God. And ye do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word (John 8:52-55).**

What Jesus said about never seeing death was truly a shocking statement. For even the idea of an afterlife was controversial among them. Indeed, the Sadducees completely denied it. Therefore, the idea of never seeing death caused those Jews to accuse Jesus of definitely having a demon, meaning he was really crazy.

Those Jews then demanded to know who Jesus was making himself. For the claim he made was truly astonishing. Knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God is now widely known. However, for those Jews he was just a former carpenter who began wandering about preaching. His miracles of healing did give him some credibility as a prophet. But to claim that whoever kept his word would never see death was too astonishing for them.

Jesus did not make of himself anybody. It was the Father who made him the only begotten Son of God. Which is why he could say, **“My Father is he who glorifies me”** Jesus is indeed greater than Abraham and all of the prophets, and his resurrection from the dead proved it.

Jesus spoke many profound truths to the Jews, even though he knew they would not understand. The truths he spoke have been recorded in the Bible for all mankind to hear throughout the ages. And it is our duty to study them, to understand them, and to apply them to our lives. Jesus did not just speak for that generation; he spoke to the world for all generations.

Remember what he said earlier: **“But he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world these things that I heard from him”** (John 8:26). That is why he was not troubled because those particular Jews did not understand. Indeed, he called them liars and sons of the devil.

Notice again that Jesus denied attempting to glorify himself. Men of the world seek their own glory, but Jesus sought the glory of God. And he knew that even when men dishonor him, God glorifies him because he always obeys him.

Older than Abraham

- **Your father Abraham rejoiced that he could see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said to him, Thou have not yet fifty years, and thou have seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am.**

- **Therefore they took up stones so that they might throw at him, but Jesus was hid, and went out of the temple, having passed through the midst of them, and thus passed on** (John 8:56-59).

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and he existed before the world began. Remember, he was Jehovah who interacted with the ancient Hebrews (see First Corinthians 10:4). He was God who promised Abraham that he would be the father of a multitude of nations (see Genesis 17:4). And after Abraham perished he was taken up to heaven where he was able to see the Son of God. And he was also able to see the fulfillment of his promise.

When Moses asked Jehovah his name, God replied, **“I AM WHO I AM”** (Exodus 3:14). And when Jesus applied that expression **“I am”** to himself, the Jews sought to stone him. Yet he truly is the I AM who spoke with Abraham and Moses.

How he was hid from them is not told. Perhaps those who believed in him surrounded him such that he could not be seen. For the next passage says his disciples were with him as he passed on.

Doing the works of God

- **And as he passed on, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him. I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night comes when no man can work. When I am in the world, I am the light of the world** (John 9:1-5).

Those disciples attributed the man's blindness to sin. They even wondered if that blind man had sinned in his mother's womb. It was not uncommon for people in those days to think the unborn had the power of volition.

For example, Judah's daughter-in-law bore twins, and this is what the record says happened when they were born: **“And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed, that one put out a hand. And the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out. And she said, Why have thou made a breach for thyself? Therefore his name was called Perez”** (Genesis 38:27-29).

Historically the firstborn were given special rights. And when little Perez drew back his hand and his brother came out first, Perez failed to get those rights. Hence, he made a breach for himself. It is certainly true that sin is the cause of all evil, but as the story of Job proves, our suffering is not always caused by our personal sins.

Jesus did not comment about the volition of the unborn. He simply said that neither the man nor his parents sinned. He said the reason the man was born blind was **“that the works of God might be manifested in him.”** That means God allowed the man to be born blind for the purpose of giving Jesus the opportunity to heal him.

Dear reader, never criticize God for doing such things. Humbly accept what he allows to happen to us, and always remember this passage: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). That blind man served to reveal the works of God, and bring glory to God. And that man will be forever remembered because of this story in the Holy Bible.

Jesus said he must work the works of him who sent him while it is day, meaning while he lived in this world. God sent his Son into the world to do his works, which included (1) calling men to repent, (2) proclaiming his good news of our salvation, (3) preparing for the establishment of the kingdom of God, (4) proving that sin is not inevitable, (5) qualifying himself to become our redeemer and save our souls, (6) to bring many sons to glory, (7) to be a model for us to imitate, (8) to show what God is really like.

Righteousness is accomplished by wisely utilizing the resources we have been given. And our energy and time are among our best resources. And since we all live short lives here in this world it is our duty to use those things diligently to bear fruit for righteousness. For we are going to be judged by our works. As the apostle John said about the great judgment day, **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:12).

And again Jesus said he was the light of the world. He was the light of the world while he was in the world. And he is now the light of the world through the record we have of him in the Bible. Light enables us to see, and that is what our knowledge of Jesus and his good news does for us. It enables us to see the truth of the greater spiritual things of reality.

What he meant by night coming when no man can work, is the end of our lives in this world. For once we die we can never return. Hence, like Jesus, we must work the works of God while it is day, while we are still alive in the world.

Healing the blind man

- **Having said these things, he spat toward the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and rubbed the clay on the eyes of the blind man. And he said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated, He who has been sent). Therefore he went and washed, and came seeing** (John 9:6-7).

It is interesting how Jesus used various methods of healing. Sometimes he just told whoever asked him to heal someone to go because the healing had been done. Sometimes just touching his garment would heal someone. In this case he made clay of his spittle, rubbed it on the eyes of the blind man, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And when the man obeyed him, he received his sight.

Telling a man to go wash to be healed is similar to a miracle of healing that is described in the Old Testament. Here is part of that story: **“Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him Jehovah had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.**

“And the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden, and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would heal him of his leprosy. And a man went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maiden who is of the land of Israel.

“And the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, And now when this letter has come to thee, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to thee that thou may heal him of his leprosy.

“And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he tore his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to heal a man of his leprosy? But consider, I pray you, and see how he seeks a quarrel against me. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Why have thou torn thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

“So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shall be clean. But Naaman was angry, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leper. Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

“And his servants came near, and spoke to him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, would thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he says to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. And his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (Second Kings 5:1-14).

Unlike Naaman, the blind man did not protest about having to wash in a certain place to be healed. Power and success often makes men proud, and they are more easily offended by things they are told to do that they do not understand. Nevertheless, at the urging of his servants, Naaman did obey the prophet Elisha. And he did return gratefully to him after he was healed.

Here is that part of that story: **“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him. And he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, take a present from thy servant. But he said, As Jehovah lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused.**

“And Naaman said, If not, yet, I pray thee, let there be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of dirt, for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to Jehovah. In this thing Jehovah pardon thy servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my

hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said to him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way” (Second Kings 5:15-19). (The last part of the story is about the foolish greed of Elisha’s servant.)

There are many lessons in that story, but I will only describe one. The unsung heroine is the humble maiden who was responsible for Naaman coming to Elisha. That little girl was not bitter about having been stolen away from her family and made a bondswoman in a foreign country. Such things were common in those days. Moreover, she may have been of a very poor family, and her capture enabled her to live much better in the house of a rich man.

Nevertheless, instead of resenting her capture, she obeyed this principle of righteousness that Jesus spoke many centuries later: **“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, so that ye may become sons of your Father in the heavens, because he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Matthew 5:44-45). And she also obeyed this principle of righteousness which the apostle Paul spoke: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21).

The people wondered how he could see

- **The neighbors therefore and those who saw him formerly, that he was blind, said, Is this not he who sits and begs? Others said, He is this man, but others said, He is like him. That man said, I am. They said to him therefore, How were thine eyes opened?**
- **That man answered and said, A man called Jesus made clay, and rubbed on my eyes, and said to me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And after going and washing, I received sight. Therefore they said to him, Where is that man? He says, I do not know** (John 9:9-12).

Those who knew the man were naturally very curious about how he could see. And when they asked him he described to them exactly as it happened. In the meantime Jesus had gone elsewhere, and so the man could not tell them where Jesus was. Jesus often healed quietly and without attracting attention. Nevertheless, Jesus did not command the man to keep silent about how he was healed, which is what he had done to some others. Jesus no doubt knew the stir the healing would create. And he probably anticipated how the Pharisees would confront the man about it, which is described next.

The Pharisees interrogate him

- **They brought him to the Pharisees—the former blind man. Now it was a sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Again therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he received sight. And he said to them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and I see.**

- **Therefore some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath. Other men said, How is a sinful man able to do such signs? And there was division among them. They say again to the blind man, What do thou say about him, that he opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a prophet (John 9:13-17).**

That passage indicates there was some division even among the Pharisees about Jesus, as well as among the general population. Some of the Pharisees condemned Jesus for not keeping the sabbath, the perverted sabbath they had created with all their added rules and regulations. For Jesus never violated the sabbath as it was given by God through Moses. Nevertheless, other men could not believe Jesus was a sinful man, because a sinful man could not do such signs. Those men were correct about him, because signs such as that one proved that the Father was with him.

The Pharisees and the people were divided about Jesus, but the man who received his sight had no doubt that Jesus was a prophet. He was the one who benefitted most from that mighty miracle, and he was not going to deny him.

The Jews question his parents

- **The Jews therefore did not believe about him, that he had been blind, and had received sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, whom ye say that he was born blind? How then does he now see? (John 9:18-19).**

Jesus restored the sight of other men who had been blind, but this man was apparently the first. Therefore, it caused a great stir among the Jews. Restoring the sight of a man born blind is truly an astonishing miracle. For it not only enabled his eyes to work normally, but it enabled his brain to interpret and understand what he saw.

Few people realize that our ability to see requires years of learning, because seeing is more than simply sensing visual images. See my comments about how he healed another blind man (Mark 8:22-26) for more information about restoring vision.

Those Jews could not believe the man had actually been blind. Therefore, they went to his parents to confirm it. And strangely, the Jews asked his parents how he was now able to see. The man had already told them, but they could not believe it. It was too incredible for them, especially because it was done by Jesus, the man they rejected.

Fear of confessing Jesus as Christ

- **And his parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind, but how he now sees, we know not. Or who opened his eyes, we know not. He has maturity, ask him. He will speak for himself.**
- **His parents spoke these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man confessed him as Christ, he should**

become excommunicated from the synagogue. Because of this his parents said, He has maturity, ask him (John 9:20-23).

Becoming excommunicated from the synagogue because of confessing Jesus as Christ may have only been done by the synagogues in Judea, and not those of Galilee. It may have been that way because the record tells how Jesus often went into synagogues to preach. Remember, it was in Judea where the Jews sought to kill Jesus, as this passage says: **“And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for he did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him”** (John 7:1). Remember, Samaria separated Judea from Galilee.

Hence, because of that policy by the Jews the man’s parents feared being excommunicated. They either had no faith in Jesus, or they were like the rulers mentioned in this passage: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43).

How the blind man could see

- **So they called the man who was blind, for a second time, and said to him, Give glory to God. We know that this man is sinful. That man therefore answered and said, If he is sinful, I know not. One thing I know, that being blind, now I see. But again they said to him, What did he do to thee? How did he open thine eyes?**
- **He answered them, I told you already, and ye did not listen. Why do ye want to hear it again? Do ye not also want to become his disciples? They reviled him, and said, Thou are a disciple of that man, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but this man, we know not where he is from.**
- **The man answered and said to them, For in this it is amazing, that ye know not where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. And we know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any man is a worshiper of God, and does his will, he listens to this man. From the age, it was not heard that any man opened the eyes of a man who was born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.**
- **They answered and said to him, Thou were born entirely in sins, and thou teach us? And they cast him outside (John 9:24-34).**

That former blind man had more wisdom than all of those Pharisees put together. And that is not uncommon in the world. Therefore, be not awed by men just because they have more formal education and higher positions of authority. Faith in the theory of evolution is a modern example of men with formal education and high positions promoting a false and foolish theory. Beware of such men, because like the man who was born blind, if you try to teach them the truth, they will just revile you and cast you out.

Remember what the Pharisees themselves said about Jesus, **“Have any of the rulers believed in him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude that does not know the law are accursed”** (John 7:48-49). And consider what Jesus said about those who believe in him: **“In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, and said, I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight”** (Luke 10:21).

By continuing to ask the blind man how he was healed, those Pharisees were desperate to find a different explanation. They could not believe in Jesus. They were the blind ones, too blind in their hearts to believe in him. They were also too self-righteous and arrogant to have the kind of spirit required for faith in him. By the very nature of what they had made of themselves they proved to be unworthy of eternal life.

Becoming seeing and becoming blind

- **Jesus heard that they cast him outside. And having found him, he said to him, Do thou believe in the Son of God? That man answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? And Jesus said to him, Thou have both seen him, and he is that man who speaks with thee.**
- **And he affirmed, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him. And Jesus said, For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing might see, and those who see might become blind** (John 9:35-39).

Jesus went to the man when he heard that the Pharisees had cast him outside. Jesus may also have heard that the man called him a prophet. That may be another reason he went to him, because it was not often that Jesus went to individual men without being asked. When Jesus identified himself, and asked him if he believed, the man immediately said he did, and he worshiped him.

Jesus then spoke these words, **“For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing might see, and those who see might become blind.”** The seeing that he spoke about was figurative. He has truly opened the eyes (of the minds) of those who believe in him so they could free themselves from the darkness of sin and error in the world.

Causing those who see to become blind refers to unbelievers who have good vision, but are unable to see the truth of his good news of our salvation. For example, when Paul spoke about the Jews who rejected Jesus, he said, **“But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:15-16).

What Jesus meant by **“For judgment I came into this world”** was not to make final judgment, but to proclaim his good news of our salvation. That is the judgment that will judge us at the last day. For he later said to the Jews: **“I have come a light into the world, so that every man who believes in me may not remain in the darkness. And if any man hears my sayings, and will not believe, I do not judge him, for I came not so that I might judge the world, but that I might save the world. He who rejects me and does**

not receive my sayings, has that which judges him: the word that I spoke, that will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

Ignorance can sometimes be an excuse

- **And those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and they said to him, Are we also blind? Jesus said to them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin, but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remains (John 9:40-41).**

What Jesus said clearly shows that ignorance can sometimes excuse sin. Remember however, we are born with a basic sense of the righteousness of God (sensing what is right and wrong). And we become aware of those things early in our childhood. As Paul said, **“For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news”** (Romans 2:14-16).

Thus, knowledge of God’s laws of righteousness is both intuitive and intellectual. That means no man has complete ignorance of them. Moreover, willfully neglecting or refusing to learn the commands of God is never excusable.

The reply Jesus gave to the Pharisees may refer to their pride. For if they claimed to know the will of God, yet refused to accept it from Jesus, their sin would indeed remain. Remember what he said about entering into the kingdom of God: **“Truly I say to you, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it”** (Mark 10:15). By proudly claiming they could see, yet rejecting Jesus, they could never claim ignorance as an excuse.

Jesus was the door of the sheep

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter in by the door into the fold of the sheep, but goes up some other way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens to this man.**
- **And the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them. And the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And they will, no, not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.**
- **Jesus spoke this allegory to them, but those men did not understand what it was that he spoke to them.**

- **Jesus therefore said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, that I am the door of the sheep. All, as many as came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.**
- **I am the door. If any man enters in by me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and will find pasture. The thief comes not, except that he might steal and kill and destroy. I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:1-10).**

The Jews were very familiar with how shepherds care for their sheep. Therefore, Jesus applied that understanding to the relationship between him and his disciples. Jesus is both the shepherd and the door; we who belong to him are the sheep; the sheepfold is the kingdom of God or the church; the gatekeeper symbolizes God. And anybody who tries to enter the kingdom of God without going through Christ is a thief and a robber.

Remember, only those who have the right kind of spirit are the sheep of Jesus: those who are humble, open minded, and hunger for truth and righteousness. They are the kind of souls that are receptive to him; they are the sheep that will follow him because they know his voice. They are the kind of people who are able to see that what he says and does is genuinely from God, being full of truth and righteousness.

I marvel while reading the biographies of him, because whenever he spoke, wisdom poured out of his mouth. No such words could ever have been invented by mere men, much less men of common stature during those ancient times. For, as the men who were sent by the chief priests to arrest Jesus said, **“A man never so spoke like this man”** (John 7:46).

Those who love truth and righteousness will not follow thieves and robbers. And that is what men were who came before Jesus and claimed to be the Christ. And that is what all men are who claim to speak for God, but ignore his holy word. Such men prey upon ignorant people in order to exalt themselves, but Jesus came so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly both, on the earth and in heaven.

Jesus was the good shepherd

- **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. But the hired man, and not being the shepherd, whose sheep are not his own, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep. But the hireling flees because he is a hireling, and it is no care to him about the sheep.**
- **I am the good shepherd, and I know mine, and I am known by mine. Just as the Father knows me, I also know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:11-15).**

Jesus contrasted himself as the good shepherd with the hired man. Hired men look out for themselves first, because they do not care for the sheep. When danger comes the hired man abandons the sheep. Jesus has such care for the sheep that he sacrificed his life for

them. Remember, we who are humble and lowly, who love truth and are eager to learn it, and who strive to live righteously are his sheep.

Jesus came into this world to endure every trial and temptation, and gave his life as a ransom for us. He did those things in obedience to the will of God the Father, and because he loves his sheep. And having obeyed him completely, proving his moral and spiritual superiority, God rewarded him with authority over all things, and with the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him.

Unlike popular belief, Jesus did not take our punishment for us, because that would have been unjust. And justice is the foundation of God's throne. It supports his right to command us to be just, and his right to judge our obedience. Therefore, God would never be so unjust as to punish an innocent man. The evil rulers of the Jews are who punished him.

Jesus always obeyed the Father, even to the point of submitting to death by crucifixion. Therefore, God rewarded his Son for his perfect obedience by giving him authority over all things, and by having the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. Jesus can now redeem all who belong to him, the sheep that hear his voice and follow him.

Jesus bought us from God with the price of his blood. Consider what Paul said: **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is of God”** (First Corinthians 6:19-20).

Jesus said he knows his, and he was known by his. That means he knows who are the sheep of the world, those with the kind of spirit that makes them worthy of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven. And every soul with that kind of spirit will be drawn to him. We are drawn to him because we love the kind of spirit he has, and we love what he teaches and his way of life.

Jesus said that he knows us and we know him, just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father. What he meant by knowing is identifying with. And that means we are all kindred spirits. That is one reason why Jesus prayed that we would all be united together with him and the Father: **“And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me”** (John 17:20-21).

Other sheep

- **And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring those also, and they will hear my voice. And there will become one flock, one shepherd** (John 10:16).

The other sheep that Jesus has are all those of other countries and of other generations. For there are righteous souls virtually everywhere that men are found. The church of Jesus Christ is an international brotherhood that will exist until the end of the world. And we are all united together by accepting him as our shepherd and following him. For the only way we can be one flock is to follow him, which means accepting his teachings and obeying

his commandments. Those commandments are all now recorded for us in the New Testament scriptures. And those who are truly his sheep prove it by following him that way.

Laying down his life

- **Because of this the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, so that I may take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father** (John 10:17-18).

Jesus willingly submitted himself to death by crucifixion. The Jews could never have crucified him without him allowing it. He allowed himself to be killed so that he could bring himself back to life. He did those things because God commanded it of him, and he always obeyed the Father.

And Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the ultimate proof that he is exactly what he claimed to be: the only begotten Son of God. And it was the knowledge of his resurrection that energized his humble disciples to go out and evangelize the world.

Continued division about him

- **Therefore again there became a division among the Jews because of these words. And many of them said, He has a demon, and is mad. Why do ye listen to him? Others said, These are not the sayings of a man possessed with a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?** (John 10:19-21).

Unable to understand the rich and beautiful words that Jesus was saying, many of the Jews dismissed him as being a crazy man possessed by a demon. They were unable to appreciate what he was saying because their eyes were blinded and their hearts were hardened.

Those who believed in him may not have understood all that he said, but they knew he was not a crazy man possessed by a demon. No demon or crazy man could have ever opened the eyes of the blind. And those who doubted him could not deny that.

Similar divisions and controversies about Jesus have been occurring ever since he began his ministry. A simple search on the internet will reveal the enormous range of opinions about him, from those who rage viciously against him, to those who worship him as being God the Father himself. Study the Bible record, the word of God, if you want to know the truth about him.

His works testified about him

- **And the feast of the dedication happened at Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch. The Jews therefore surrounded him, and said to him, When do thou lift up our soul? If thou are the Christ, tell us plainly.**

- **Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye did not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you (John 10:22-26).**

The feast of the dedication (now called Hanukkah) was never one commanded by Moses, nor is it mentioned in the Old Testament. It was added much later (in the second century before Christ) by a leader of the Jews called Judas Maccabaeus to celebrate his purification of the temple after it had been defiled by a foreign conqueror.

The Jews wanted Jesus to explain clearly who he was, because they were confused about him. Was he the Christ or not? Jesus did not say either yes or no. He simply reminded them what he had been saying and doing all along. Talk is easy, mighty works are difficult. And his mighty works were all the evidence they needed to know that he was who he claimed to be.

Nevertheless, they were confused about him because they could not believe such a humble and lowly man could really be the long awaited Messiah. Jesus was nothing like the Messiah they anticipated. They expected a powerful warrior-king like David, who would free them from the Romans and lead their country to greatness.

They were confused about Jesus because of their misconceptions. And most men today cannot accept the authentic Jesus because of their misconceptions about him. They claim to believe in Christ, but what they believe is a mythical Christ invented to satisfy how they want him to be. When they are faced with the genuine teachings about him, they reject them and condemn those who proclaim the truth about him.

For example, I remember reading many years ago what a woman said who claimed to be a Christian. When she read the Bible, she said the Christ it describes there "was not nice." She preferred to believe in a false christ contrived by men.

His sheep are guaranteed eternal life

- **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given to me, is greater than all, and not one is able to snatch out of my Father's hand (John 10:27-29).**

The humble and lowly, who love truth and righteousness, and who have open minds to hear the genuine words of the good news of Christ, they can see that he is what he claims to be. And they will believe and obey him. And he has promised us who believe that we will never die, but will live with him forever. Those are marvelous words of encouragement for us, especially as we endure the trials and temptations of this sinful world.

And what Jesus said about God the Father is also very encouraging. For nothing can take us from Jesus our Savior or from God the Father. Paul also spoke beautiful words of assurance of our divine protection, when he said, **"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor agents, nor principal positions, nor powers, nor things that have come, nor things that are coming, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:38-39).

Jesus and the Father are one

- **I and the Father are one** (John 10:30).

Notice in the previous passage from John how Jesus said that the Father was greater than all. Jesus always spoke of God the Father as supreme, and he was only doing the Father's will not his own. For example, he said to the Jews, **"My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me"** (John 7:16). Yet now he says he and the Father were one. If those words are interpreted to mean Jesus was claiming complete equality with the Father, then he would be contradicting himself. But Jesus never claimed complete equality with the Father.

When Jesus said that he and the Father are one, it is a oneness like the ideal of a man and his wife. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews about that: **"Have ye not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother behind, and will be bonded with his wife, and the two will be in one flesh? So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, no man shall separate"** (Matthew 19:4-6).

A husband and his wife are one flesh by being so united in their hearts. That is the way that Jesus and the Father are one. A wife is one flesh with her husband, but she is not equal in every way with him, for the husband is head of the wife. As Paul said, **"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Because a husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church, and himself the savior of the body"** (Ephesians 5:22-23).

Likewise Jesus is not equal in every way with the Father. For Paul also said, **"But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ, and the head of a woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God"** (First Corinthians 11:3).

We are gods

- **Therefore again the Jews took up stones so that they might stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from my Father. Because of them, which work do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, We stone thee not about a good work, but about blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, make thyself God.**
- **Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods? If he designated those men gods, for whom the word of God came to be (and the scripture cannot be broken), whom the Father made holy and sent into the world, do ye say, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?** (John 10:31-36).

Jesus quoted that Old Testament passage (Psalm 82:6) to remind the people that even we are gods. It is the devil and those deluded by him that deny we are gods. We are gods because we are God's offspring with the potential to become his sons for eternity. However, we are nothing like the gods worshiped by sinners. We are gods by being sons of God. And all who are disciples of Christ are united with God through his Holy Spirit.

In contrast, all who reject Christ and his righteousness lose their divinity and will be condemned to perish. That is told in the same part of the psalm that Jesus quoted from: **"God**

stands in the congregation of God. He judges among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and respect the persons of the wicked? ... Judge the poor man and the orphan. Do justice to the afflicted and destitute man. Rescue the poor and needy man. Deliver from the hand of the wicked man. They know not, nor do they understand. They walk to and fro in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High. Nevertheless ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the rulers" (Psalm 82:1-7).

That passage says God judges among the gods. And those who do things like respect the persons of the wicked, fail to show mercy and do justly, and who walk to and fro in darkness, will **"die like men."** That means all who live unrighteously will lose their divinity and will perish. They will perish in the second death, which is described in the book of Revelation: **"This is the second death, the lake of fire"** (Revelation 20:14). The lake of fire is hell.

God is King of kings and Lord of lords, both in heaven and on the earth. And he has made mankind the lords of the earth under his authority. He is also sharing with us the experience of being lords in a world where there are many hostile elements, evil creatures, and rebellious spirits.

Thus on the earth God is giving us the opportunity to experience what he does; namely, living righteously and productively while having to endure hostile opposition of many kinds. And all men who love God, and endure the trials and temptations of this world filled with God's enemies, doing good works and opposing evil, can qualify to become God's sons for eternity in heaven.

Those Jews just could not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Consequently, they thought he was guilty of blasphemy when he said he was one with the Father. Since Jesus always spoke rationally, he then tried to show them that we are all gods. We are all gods because we are offspring of God.

Believe him because of his works

- **If I am not doing the works of my Father, do not believe me. But if I am doing them, even though ye do not believe me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him** (John 10:37-38).

If any man does not do the works of justice, truth, and righteousness—the works of the Father—then we should not believe such a man. As Jesus also said, **"For a good tree is not producing corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree producing good fruit. For each tree is known from its own fruit"** (Luke 6:43-44). Nevertheless, a word of caution: the fruits of a man may not be obvious, because wicked men often disguise themselves as righteous.

Paul spoke of such men, when he said, **"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his helpers also disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works"** (Second Corinthians 11:13-15).

Jesus then said that even if they did not believe him, when they see him doing the mighty works of righteousness they should believe the works, that they are from God. Because they prove that the Father is in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Father. For no man could do the mighty works that Jesus was doing unless God was with him.

Jesus departed to where John had been

- **Therefore they sought again to take him, and he went forth out of their hand. And he departed again beyond the Jordan into the place where John was first immersing, and he stayed there. And many came to him, and they said, John indeed did not one sign, but all, as many things as John spoke about this man, were true. And many believed in him there (John 10:39-42).**

Remember, Jesus had gone as in private to the feast in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he had done much teaching and healing while he was there. And he eventually aroused his enemies such that they sought to take him. However, he was somehow able to escape, and he departed again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first immersing. Although this biography of Jesus does not say, John the immerser had probably been arrested by this time.

Therefore, as they had done with John, many came to Jesus there and they believed in him. The passage indicates they believed in him for at least two reasons: (1) John had testified that Jesus was the Son of God, and (2) what John said about Jesus had proven to be true. Those reasons indicate the people who came to Jesus there had been disciples of John.

His friend Lazarus was sick

- **Now a certain Lazarus, from Bethany of the village of Mary and her sister Martha, was sick. And Mary was the woman who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. The sisters therefore sent to him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou love is sick (John 11:1-3).**

The Bible tells about two women who had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with their hair. One of them was the sinful woman who came to him while he was dining with a Pharisee (see Luke 7:36-50). Mary was the other woman. And a little farther in this biography of Jesus, John tells about Mary doing that to him (see John 12:1-8). Many have claimed the unnamed sinful woman who anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair was Mary Magdalene. However, that accusation is completely unjustified. See Luke 8:1-4 for my comments about that.

Martha had earlier invited Jesus into her house and fed him (see Luke 10:38). Lazarus, Mary, and Martha all believed in Jesus, and they became good friends with him. Therefore, Mary and Martha knew that Jesus could heal Lazarus of his illness, and that he would want to heal him. Consequently, they sent a message to inform him that Lazarus was sick.

Notice in that passage, however, that the sisters did not mention Lazarus' name. They simply said, **"Lord, behold, he whom thou love is sick."** Now that does not mean Lazarus

was the only disciple that Jesus loved. For the apostle John also referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (see, for example, John 19:26).

Jesus had healed many people, but only a few of them became his friends. Indeed, although he had many disciples, apparently only a few of them became his friends. And apparently they were the ones referred to as those whom he loved. Of course, that does not mean that Jesus did not love all of his disciples, but those who became his friends were loved in a special way.

Consider what James said about Abraham being called a friend of God: **“And the scripture was fulfilled, which says, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, and he was called a friend of God”** (James 2:23). And since God is impartial, then we too can be called a friend of God if we have the kind of faith in God and obedience to him that Abraham had.

The sickness was to bring glory to God and Christ

- **But when Jesus heard, he said, This sickness is not about death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. When therefore he heard that he is sick, then he actually remained two days in that place he was** (John 11:4-6).

God sometimes revealed things like that beforehand to his Son, and sometimes he did not. For example, Jesus did not know who touched him when the woman with the issue of blood was healed, because he had to ask who it was (see Mark 5:30). However, from what Jesus said and did when he heard about Lazarus, there is no doubt that he did know about it beforehand. For he said to his disciples, **“This sickness is not about death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”**

Saying that Lazarus’ sickness was not about death was a way of telling them it would not end his life in the world. Although Lazarus did die, Jesus later raised him from the dead. And that did indeed bring glory to God which glorified the Son of God.

The passage says that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Nevertheless, he delayed two days before going to Lazarus. He knew they would be grieving during those two days. And he knew they would suffer knowing that Jesus was not there to keep Lazarus from dying. Yet even though he loved them, he subjected them to that suffering. He allowed them to suffer that way because he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. And that would not only bring glory to God and to Jesus, but it would bring great rejoicing to them all.

And that is an important lesson for us. God allows us to suffer for a time in this dark and troubled world because he is going to save our souls and give us eternal life. And that will not only bring glory to God and to Jesus our Redeemer, but it will bring great rejoicing to us all. Therefore, we should be encouraged by having that great hope, which we have because of our love for him, our faith in him, and our obedience to him.

Jesus prepares to go

- **Later after this he says to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. The disciples say to him, Rabbi, the Jews were now seeking to stone thee, and thou go there again.**
- **Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any man walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him (John 11:7-10).**

Jesus' disciples may have concluded that Jesus was not concerned about Lazarus' sickness, because they also must have heard the message that Martha and Mary sent to him. Moreover, Jesus had said to them about that sickness, **"This sickness is not about death."** Consequently, they must have thought Lazarus would recover on his own.

Therefore, they reminded him about how dangerous it was to return to Judea, dangerous because of his Jewish enemies who wanted to kill him. Nevertheless, Jesus always knew what he was doing, even though his disciples sometimes doubted. And there were a few times when Peter even contradicted him.

His response to them was to teach a lesson, a very subtle lesson. What he said about being able to see because of the light, and stumbling without it, is obvious to everybody. However, he spoke those words in a figurative sense, and they probably symbolize the wise use of the opportunities we have. For knowledge is light for our minds. And when we apply that knowledge, then we can act successfully. Without knowledge we stumble and fail. Jesus came to bring the light of the knowledge of God to us. And we must use it wisely if we are going to live a successful spiritual life. Without it our spiritual lives will stumble.

Jesus waited for Lazarus to die, because he was going to bring him back from the dead, which would bring glory to God and to him. And that would increase faith in him, which would then enable more souls to have the light of his good news of salvation in them, thus enabling them to walk without stumbling. For Jesus was the light of the world. Remember what he said to his disciples formerly: **"I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night comes when no man can work. When I am in the world, I am the light of the world"** (John 9:4-5).

He tells them Lazarus died

- **He spoke these things, and after this he says to them, Our friend Lazarus has become asleep, but I go that I may awake him. His disciples therefore said, Lord, if he has become asleep, he will be healed.**
- **But Jesus had spoken about his death, but those men thought that he was speaking about the restfulness of sleep. Therefore Jesus then said to them plainly, Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that ye may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him (John 11:11-15).**

The New Testament sometimes refers to death as a form of sleep, and that is how Jesus described the death of Lazarus. However, his disciples did not understand until he told them plainly.

Notice how Jesus said he was glad he was not there when Lazarus died. People of the world would say that Jesus was cruel for being glad he was not there, especially if he could have prevented his death. However, part of being a child of God is to accept when God wants us to suffer. For he always has a high and noble reason for our suffering, because our suffering for his righteousness always ends in joy and happiness.

Just consider God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ. God required him to suffer in this life and be crucified because he had a high and noble purpose for him. That was the only way he could redeem us from the condemnation of our sins, for us to escape being punished with the unrepentant sinners and the devil and the demons.

Thomas anticipates dangerous persecution

- **Therefore Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him (John 11:16).**

Thomas seems to have been the most outspoken skeptic of the apostles. He did not have enough confidence in Jesus to think they might not be killed by the Jews. And after Jesus was resurrected, Thomas did not accept the testimony of the other apostles that Jesus had been raised from the dead (see John 20:25). Consequently, Thomas is now known as doubting Thomas. Nevertheless, Thomas remained a faithful apostle of Jesus.

Going to Lazarus

- **So when Jesus came, he found him already four days being kept in the sepulcher. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs away from it, and many of the Jews had come to the women, about Martha and Mary, so that they might console them about their brother. Therefore Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, met him, but Mary was sitting in the house (John 11:17-20)**

Bethany was about two miles southeast of Jerusalem, which would have taken less than an hour to walk between them. Nothing is said about who those Jews were who came to console Martha and Mary. They were probably both friends and relatives.

When the text says that Mary was sitting in the house when Martha went to meet Jesus, that does not mean she was snubbing him. It no doubt means that Mary had not heard that Jesus was coming. And Martha was too eager to greet Jesus first before informing Mary.

Martha confessed Jesus could have saved him

- **Martha therefore said to Jesus, Lord, if thou were here, my brother would not have died. But I know even now that as many things as thou may ask of God, God will give to thee. Jesus says to her, Thy brother will rise. Martha**

says to him, I know that he will rise in the resurrection at the last day (John 11:21-24)

Martha had great faith in Jesus. Some evil men claim her comment about him not being there was a rebuke. They are blinded by their own contempt for him. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha all loved Jesus and believed in him. And what Martha said was simply a confession of her faith that he was from God and could have saved Lazarus.

When Martha said she knew that **“even now that as many things as thou may ask of God, God will give to thee,”** that was also a confession of faith in him, and it was perhaps a humble and indirect suggestion that Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. The fact that Jesus had never performed a miracle of that magnitude is probably why she did not make such a request directly. Bring life back to a man who had been dead that long would be a greater miracle than healing a man who was afflicted with every disease and infirmity combined.

Jesus responded by telling her that her brother would rise. Many times Jesus had assured his disciples that even though we die (in the flesh) we will be resurrected (in the spirit). Our spirit will rise to live forever with a new incorruptible body. Therefore, Mary told him that she knew Lazarus would rise in the resurrection at the last day.

Martha confesses he is the Christ

- **Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he died, he will live. And every man who lives and believes in me will, no, not die, into the age. Do thou believe this? She says to him, Yes, Lord, I have believed that thou are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world** (John 11:25-27).

Jesus did not tell Martha that he was going to raise up Lazarus. Instead, he taught her a great lesson about himself. Martha had just told him that she knew Lazarus would rise in the resurrection at the last day. The resurrection at the last day is when the spirit of every man will rise up to return to God to face the day of judgment. Solomon told of our spirit rising up when he was speaking about when we die: **“... the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Jesus replied to her by saying that he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the life because it was through him that the world with every living thing in it was created. And he is the resurrection because it is through him that our spirits are resurrected after this life is over.

Jesus then said that he who believes in him, even though he died, he will live. He also said, **“And every man who lives and believes in me will, no, not die, into the age.”** Jesus had earlier proclaimed that all who belonged to him would never see death. For he said to the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51).

Jesus still did not tell Martha that he was going to raise up Lazarus from the dead. He simply asked her if she believed what he said about life and death. Martha immediately confessed her faith in him, that he was the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world.

Remember, confessing Jesus as the Christ resulted in being excommunicated from the synagogue. Yet Martha courageously confessed him, because of her great faith.

And although she knew that he could even then raise the body of Lazarus to life, she did not demand it of him. She did not even plead for it. She trusted that he was merciful and compassionate, and would do whatever was right before God. She was a righteous and dignified woman who had great faith and love for Jesus, worthy to be his friend.

Mary goes to greet Jesus

- **And when she said these things, she departed and called Mary her sister privately, saying, The teacher is here and calls thee. When that woman heard, she rises quickly, and comes to him. (Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was in the place where Martha met him.) (John 11:28-30)**

Martha called Mary privately to inform him that Jesus “the teacher” was there and called for her. Neither one of them informed the Jews that were there about Jesus. That suggests not many of them were his disciples; it was not because the sisters wanted to meet with him alone. Indeed, Jesus was not alone, because all of his apostles were there with him.

Martha may have been at or near the sepulcher when she first heard that Jesus had come, and she immediately went to meet him. The text said that Mary was in the house. Martha did not first go inform Mary, but she went directly to Jesus. And that was the right thing to do. Then after speaking with him, she went and informed Mary of his presence. When Mary heard it, she did not delay but quickly went to him.

Both of those women held Jesus in the highest regard, considering him first above anyone else. And that is what Jesus requires of us all. Remember what he commanded about that: **“If any man comes to me, and does not regard as inferior his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and besides his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross, and come behind me, cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:25-27).

Making Jesus first in our lives is right and good and just, because he not only created us (with the Father), but he suffered and sacrificed his life to become our Redeemer, saving our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins, and giving us the hope of eternal life in heaven. Who else in our lives has ever come near doing so much for us? Who ever sacrificed more for us? Who has shown that he has greater love for us?

The Jews followed Mary

- **The Jews therefore being with her in the house and consoling her, having seen Mary, that she rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying that she was going to the sepulcher that she may weep there (John 11:31).**

Although neither of the sisters told the Jews they were going to meet Jesus, nevertheless, they followed Mary anyway. They had been consoling her in the house. They probably felt

she would need even more consoling at the sepulcher. The emotion of grief can be overwhelming, and other people can help us endure it.

Mary confesses her faith in Jesus

- **Therefore when Mary came where Jesus was, after seeing him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if thou were here, my brother would not have died (John 11:32).**

The first words that Mary said to Jesus were exactly the same as those of Martha when she first met him. Perhaps they shared those words of faith together before he came, because those words told of their faith in him and the powers he had from God. They were words confessing their faith in him. They had no doubt that if Jesus had been there sooner he could, and would have saved Lazarus' life.

Yet Jesus still did not tell them he was going to raise up their brother Lazarus. If he had, their grief would have turned into joy, and that would have appeared very strange and inappropriate to the Jews who were there. It was better not to inform them beforehand. The primary purpose of the miracle was to bring glory to God and to Christ. And the effect of the miracle would be greater if it came unexpectedly.

Jesus' emotions are aroused

- **When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who gathered with her, weeping, he groaned in the spirit, and was himself troubled. And he said, Where have ye laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. The Jews therefore said, Behold how he loved him (John 11:33-36).**

The text says that Jesus **"groaned in the spirit, and was himself troubled."** And he actually wept (not with sobs, but quietly shedding tears). He knew that he would soon raise Lazarus from the dead. Yet he still groaned in his spirit, was troubled, and wept. Jesus groaned in his spirit because he saw all the people weeping, weeping at the loss of a beloved brother and friend. Let no man think that God is so aloof from us that he himself does not have strong feelings of empathy for us when we suffer, especially when we lose someone near and dear to us.

Therefore, it is extremely cruel to rail against God and accuse him when we suffer. Sin is the cause of all our suffering, and God hates and opposes sin. When God allows us to suffer, whether for our guilt or in our innocence, it is always right and good and just. It is ignorance and hatefulness that accuses him when we suffer. The Bible is filled with examples of how suffering for righteousness always ends in greater joy. Read the beautiful story of Joseph the son of Jacob for another marvelous example (see Genesis 37-50).

Notice how Jesus asked where they had laid Lazarus. He was definitely not omniscient while in his body of flesh. He lived with the same kind of human limitations we all have. Only occasionally for special reasons did God give him special awareness.

Accusing him

- **But some of them said, This man who opened the eyes of the blind man, was he not also able to cause that this man also would not die? (John 11:37).**

Not everyone there had faith in him, even though they knew he had opened the eyes of a blind man. And they murmured against him, wondering why he had not prevented Lazarus from dying. Mary and Martha did not wonder such things about him. They openly confessed their faith in him, that he would have saved Lazarus if he had been there.

And we should all openly confess our faith in Jesus, and reject foolish questioning about him. For the evidence that he is the only begotten Son of God, and that he has great love for us, is overwhelming. The Bible record is clearly from God, because there is no book that has ever been written that comes close to being filled with so much wisdom and truth; nor will there ever be, because the Bible is truly the word of God.

And always remember these encouraging words of Paul: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). Therefore, never doubt God about anything. For he has proven himself worthy of our complete faith and trust. He has proven it from all the evidence given to us by his witnesses. For our faith is not a blind faith; it is based upon abundant and conclusive evidence. It is conclusive to all who have humble hearts and open minds for it.

Jesus prepares for the miracle

- **Jesus therefore again groaning in himself comes to the sepulcher. Now it was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus says, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of the man who came to end, says to him, Lord, he smells now, for it is the fourth day.**
- **Jesus says to her, Did I not say to thee, that if thou believed, thou wilt see the glory of God? So they took away the stone where the man who died was laying (John 11:38-40).**

Remember how Martha had made a subtle plea that Jesus consider raising Lazarus from the dead, when she said to him, **“But I know even now that as many things as thou may ask of God, God will give to thee.”** (John 11:22). However, since Jesus did not say he would, she must have concluded he would not. Therefore, she reminded him how long Lazarus had been dead, and that his body was in a noticeable state of decay.

Nevertheless, Jesus gently reminded Martha of what he had said to her; namely, that if she believed she would see the glory of God. Jesus did not tell her directly that he was going to raise up Lazarus. By emphasizing the power of faith beforehand, that would help strengthen her faith after the miracle. For she would certainly remember what he said about the power of faith. That miracle was overwhelming evidence of the power of faith.

Notice how Jesus always gave the credit for his teachings and his miracles to God the Father. And we should always give the credit for our knowledge of righteousness and our blessings to both God the Father and to his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus prays aloud to God

- **And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou heard me. And I had known that thou always hear me, but because of the multitude that stands by I spoke, so that they may believe that thou sent me (John 11:41-42).**

Jesus never doubted that the Father would always be with him, because Jesus was always faithful and obedient to him. Jesus prayed many times in private, unheard by others. However, this time he prayed aloud so that the multitude could hear him give credit to the Father for the great miracle he was about to perform. That would help them believe that he had truly been sent by God. And their faith in him would save their souls and enable them to become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

Jesus was thinking of the people and their eternal salvation. That was why he waited to come to Lazarus. It was so that the people could see a great sign that God had truly sent Jesus to them. Instead of pandering to the Pharisees, who demanded some spectacular sign in the sky to entertain them, Jesus was giving a magnificent sign that would take away the sorrow and mourning from the people who had faith in him and give them great joy. It was a far superior sign for them.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

- **And having said these things, he cried out with a great voice, Lazarus, come out. And the man who died came forth, wrapped hands and feet with grave-clothes, and his face had been wrapped around with a face cloth.**
- **Jesus says to them, Loose him, and allow him to go. Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and who saw what Jesus did, believed in him (John 11:43-45).**

That was truly a stupendous miracle, and it did cause many of the Jews to believe in him. Nevertheless, notice how the passage did not say they all believed in him. There are some people whose hearts are so hardened that nothing can persuade them. Therefore, do not waste your time trying to evangelize such people, but shake the dust from your feet and forget them. That is what Jesus did with unrepentant sinners who refuse the evidence he gave.

The rulers still hated Jesus

- **But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus did. Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What are we doing? Because this man does many signs. If we allow him this way, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and the nation (John 11:46-48).**

The fact some of the Jews who were with Martha and Mary went to report to the Pharisees what happened indicates they were not all disciples. For the Pharisees were his bitter enemies. And faithful disciples would not have aided his enemies that way.

Even though those Pharisees were told of that amazing miracle, no act of righteousness that Jesus did could persuade the chief priests and the Pharisees to believe in him. Remember how they accused him of casting out demons by the power of the devil (see Matthew 12:24). They were unrepentant sinners whose hearts were hardened against him, themselves full of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They were like the devil himself.

They were not only envious of Jesus (see Matthew 27:18), but they feared him. They were afraid the entire population would believe in him. And they imagined that would foment an uprising, causing the Romans to destroy them and the nation. The Jews expected the Christ to be a mighty warrior-king who would free them from Roman occupation. But those rulers could not conceive of Jesus being such a man.

What they feared would never have happened, because Jesus would not allow such a thing. Remember how previously the multitude tried to make him king: **“And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and having expressed thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those who were sitting down, likewise also of the fishes as much as they wanted.**

“And when they were filled, he says to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain over, so that not anything may be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets of fragments from the five barley loaves that remained over from those who have eaten.

“When therefore the men saw what sign Jesus did, they said, This really is the prophet who comes into the world. Jesus therefore having perceived that they are going to come and seize him, so that they might make him king, departed onto the mountain himself alone” (John 6:10-15).

Nevertheless, the twisted minds of those rulers feared he would raise up a revolt against the Romans. They feared he would for at least two reasons: (1) they knew nothing about the true character and spirit of Jesus, and (2) they were led astray in their thinking because they were disciples of the devil who is **“the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). And the devil wanted Jesus destroyed.

The high priest prophecies

- **And a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not the whole nation should perish.**
- **Now he said this not from himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation. And not for the nation only, but also that he might gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad** (John 11:49-52).

Notice in this case how God used a sinner to prophesy. For the high priest did not understand what he was saying; he did not realize he was prophesying. He only thought he was justifying the killing of Jesus to keep the Romans from destroying them. The prophecy in those words was too far above him. Nevertheless that occasion teaches us that sometimes God even uses sinners to accomplish good things he desires. We cannot condemn everything a sinner may do.

Regarding that prophecy, Jesus did die to save the lives of the people, and not just of the nation of Israel. He died for the whole world. For it enabled him to become the Redeemer of every man to save our souls from the condemnation of our sins. He is the Redeemer of all who believe and obey him.

Paul wrote about how our salvation was from the one man Jesus: **“For if by the trespass of the one man [Adam] the many died, much more the grace of God, and the gift in grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the gift is not as through one man who sinned, for indeed the judgment from one man was for condemnation, but the gift from many offenses is for righteousness.**

“For if, by the offense of the one man, death reigned through the one man, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

“So then, as through an offense of one man was for condemnation for all men, so also through a righteousness of one man was for justification of life for all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were led sinful, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be led righteous” (Romans 5:15-19).

I speak much more about those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Son of God for Eternity*.

The rulers plan to kill Jesus

- **So from that day they consulted together so that they might kill him. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but departed from there into the region near the wilderness into a city called Ephraim, and he stayed there with his disciples** (John 11:53-54).

Ephraim was a town about twelve to fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem, which would probably have taken at least half a day to walk. Jesus probably heard of the plan by the chief priests and Pharisees to have him killed, which is why he no longer walked openly among the Jews. Remember, they had wanted to kill him even before he went to raise up Lazarus, but apparently the threat was now much greater, and his time was still not yet.

God determined the time when the Jews would put Jesus on trial and crucify him. It would be during the feast of unleavened bread, which began with Passover. And that was coming soon. For Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, would be the new Passover. As Paul said to the Christians in Corinth, **“Purge out the old leaven, so that ye may be a new lump, since ye are unleavened. For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore we should feast, not by old leaven, nor by leaven of evil and wickedness, but by non-leaven of sincerity and truth”** (First Corinthians 5:7-8).

The people sought Jesus

- **Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the countryside before the Passover, so that they might purify themselves. Therefore they sought Jesus, and spoke with each other as they stood in the temple, What does it seem to you? That he will, no, not come to the feast?**
- **Now also the chief priests and the Pharisees had given commandment, that if any man knew where he is, he should disclose it, so that they might take him (John 11:55-57).**

The purification required for the people to partake of the Passover feast was probably another addition the Jews added to the laws of Moses. The biography of Jesus by Mark speaks of some of those things: **“And the Pharisees, and some of the scholars, having come from Jerusalem, gathered in to him. And having seen some of his disciples eating their loaves with profane hands, that is, unwashed, they accused them.**

“(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, unless they wash their hands carefully, do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders. And coming from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they bathe. And there are many other things that they have taken in to retain: washings of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and beds.)

“Then the Pharisees and the scholars demand of him, Why do thy disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?” (Mark 7:1-5).

Jesus had by that time become quite famous among the Jews. And since he traveled throughout the land of Israel, the people could not ordinarily tell when he would be in Jerusalem. They could not tell except during the times of the feasts, which were required of every Israelite man. Consequently they normally expected to see him during the feast.

However, they had all been informed that the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus. Therefore, they wondered if Jesus would come anyway, knowing of the danger that he would be arrested. Those things were discussed in the temple, because that was the gathering place for the most religiously zealous of them.

Precious ointment for Jesus

- **Therefore six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, the man who died whom he raised from the dead. So they made a supper for him there, and Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those who sat dining with him. Mary therefore, after taking a pound of ointment of very costly genuine spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled of the aroma of the ointment.**
- **Therefore one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, the man who was going to betray him, says, Why was this ointment not sold for three**

hundred denarii, and given to the poor? Now he said this, not because it was a concern to him about the poor, but because he was a thief, and he had the purse and removed things that were put in.

- **Jesus therefore said, Let her alone. She has kept it for the day of my burial. For ye always have the poor with you, but ye do not always have me (John 12:1-8).**

The biographies of Jesus by Matthew, Mark, and John all say that Jesus was in Bethany when the woman anointed him. Luke does not describe this story. Remember, Bethany was located two miles southeast of Jerusalem. John says that Jesus came six days before the Passover. Both Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper when those things happened. John does not say anything about Simon or the house they were in. He only says they made the supper for him in Bethany.

Simon had probably been a lifelong leper before he met Jesus. And although the Bible does not say that Jesus healed him, I have no doubt that he did. He always healed when it was requested of him, even the Canaanite woman's daughter (see Matthew 15:22-28). Why they made the supper for him in the house of Simon the leper is not told.

Neither Matthew nor Mark identify the woman who anointed him, but John says the woman was Mary the sister of Martha. Matthew and Mark did not identify her because the stories of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus are not mentioned in their biographies of Jesus.

John also says that Mary anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, while Matthew and Mark simply said she poured the anointing oil on his head. That means Mary used the anointing oil for both his head and his feet. Matthew and Mark also say the woman was criticized by the apostles. While John only mentions the criticism by Judas. Matthew and Mark also mention that Jesus said wherever the good news may be proclaimed in the whole world, what the woman did would also be told for a memorial of her (see Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9). There are a few other differences in the wording between the biographies of him.

Such differences in descriptions actually enrich our understanding. The different biographers often describe different perspectives about the same event, focusing on different parts of it. And as with every experience, by examining different descriptions we can get a clearer idea of things that happened.

Now regarding the chronology of events, John describes the event of the woman being criticized for her anointing *before* he describes Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem. That was when Jesus was accompanied by a multitude praising him, and he was riding on a donkey to fulfill the prophecy. (It is commonly called his triumphant entrance, but calling it his grand entrance is more accurate because he had not yet achieved victory.) In contrast to John, both Matthew and Mark describe that anointing *after* they tell about Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem.

That difference in the sequence of their descriptions is obviously another one of those times when the historians described an event that was not in its chronological order. Remember, there are several examples in the Bible, in both the Old and the New testaments, where events are described that way. Sometimes the actual sequence can be deter-

mined from other passages. However, the actual sequence of the anointing and the grand entrance cannot be determined.

In the descriptions by Matthew and Mark both indicate that Judas went to the chief priests to offer to betray Jesus. Now, in this record in the book of John, it reveals that Judas was the instigator of that criticism of her, and also what his motive was for doing it. He was apparently made the treasurer of the apostles, and he used that opportunity to embezzle funds from what they had. He had no compassion for the poor; he coveted the money that expensive ointment could have brought.

Consequently, Judas probably did go immediately to betray Jesus because he was rebuked for criticizing Mary. He probably felt humiliated by that rebuke. I suspect that Judas had only remained with the other apostles because he was able to steal from their purse unnoticed. That rebuke was probably all he needed to decide to forsake them, and seek a way to get even with Jesus. It may also have given him an excuse to make a final profit. (See Matthew 26:14-16 for my comments about Judas' offer to the chief priests to betray Jesus).

Nevertheless, only Matthew and Mark say anything about Judas offer to betray Jesus to the chief Priests. However, they say nothing about Judas in their descriptions of the anointing. While John tells how Judas was the one who criticized Mary for the anointing, but he says nothing about Judas' offer to betray Jesus. Hence, putting the stories together gives us more complete information of what happened and why.

The story about Mary anointing Jesus is both interesting and instructive, but exactly when it happened makes no difference. Indeed, Luke does not even mention the story. All we know is that it happened near the time of his crucifixion. For remember, Jesus said to his apostles, **"She has kept it for the day of my burial."**

The rulers decided to kill Lazarus also

- **Now a great multitude of the Jews knew that he is there. And they came, not only because of Jesus, but that they might also see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests decided that they should kill Lazarus also, since because of him many of the Jews were believing in Jesus (John 12:9-11).**

Knowledge about the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead that way attracted much attention from the people. Therefore, they came to see both Jesus and Lazarus. They came to Bethany to see them because they had heard they were there. And they were no doubt part of the great multitude that accompanied Jesus on his grand entrance into Jerusalem, which is described in the next passage.

The report that the chief priests decided to also kill Lazarus helps reveal the depth of their evil. They were no better than the worst of modern organized crime leaders. For them murder is an acceptable solution to problems they have. Like the devil himself they disguised themselves with the appearance of respectability and piety. They were supposed to lead the people to obey God and his laws, but as Jesus had earlier taught, they were hypocrites. And many modern men who are supposed to lead people to obey God and his will for us are hypocrites. Therefore, beware of such men. Study and obey the teachings of the Bible and you will be safe from them.

Entering Jerusalem on a donkey

- **On the morrow a great multitude having come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!**
- **And Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat on it, as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, thy King comes, sitting on a donkey's colt (John 12:12-15).**

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times after he began his ministry. But this was his grand entrance as the King of Israel. And the multitudes honored him that way, shouting out in praise to him. They even spread things on the road as a sign of honor to him, just as we do in modern times with what we call the red carpet treatment. Those people even laid down their own garments (see Matthew 21:8). Those things would also have helped reduce the dust of the road created by the multitudes.

The prophecy about the donkey was from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. It says, **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy king comes to thee. He is just, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon a donkey, even upon a colt the foal of a donkey”** (Zechariah 9:9).

Kings of the world make their grand entrances sitting loftily on noble steeds, not on lowly donkeys, which are used by the common people. Jesus is the King of kings, yet he chose to make his grand entrance into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Remember, Jesus said to the people about himself: **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus and God his Father have the ultimate power over all things. Yet Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. And if we want to be faithful disciples of him, then we too must be meek and lowly in heart. And we must show it in our lives.

However, that does not mean we should shirk from our battle against sin and wickedness; we must be courageous in our opposition to evil. Remember what David said about Jehovah: **“With the merciful thou will show thyself merciful. With the perfect man thou will show thyself perfect. With the pure thou will show thyself pure. And with the perverse thou will show thyself contrary. And the afflicted people thou will save, but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou may bring them down”** (Second Samuel 22:26-28).

His disciples later remembered

- **Now his disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these were things written because of him, and they did these things to him (John 12:16).**

With almost all prophecies, they are not understood until after the events happen. And in this case, his disciples did not understand even when the prophecy was fulfilled. It was

only after Jesus was glorified (by his resurrection from the dead) that they remembered that prophecy about the king of Israel riding a lowly donkey and not a majestic horse.

Many of the old testament prophecies were not understood until after the events happened. And that was the case of the prophecies about the Christ. They were given so that when Jesus fulfilled them that would be evidence to help prove that Jesus was the Christ.

The multitude was awed but the Pharisees were appalled

- **Therefore the multitude, the one that was with him when he called Lazarus from the sepulcher, and raised him from the dead, testified. Also because of this the multitude met him, because they heard of him doing this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Do ye see that ye accomplish nothing. Behold, the world has gone after him (John 12:17-19).**

Jesus no doubt knew how the people would respond to his raising Lazarus from the dead that way. It prepared them for his grand entrance into Jerusalem. It stirred them to come and join him as he entered the city. And they not only joined him, but they praised him for who he was, the King of Israel. In contrast the Pharisees were greatly depressed, being afraid that he had already won everybody over to him.

It is a general rule that the righteous rejoice when righteousness is done, but the wicked groan. Here is one proverb that expresses that principle: **“It is joy to the righteous to do justice, but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity”** (Proverbs 21:15). The disciples of Jesus rejoiced over the resurrection of Lazarus, but the evil Pharisees lamented.

Some Greeks wanted to see Jesus

- **Now some Greeks were from those who came up so that they might worship at the feast. These men therefore came to Philip, the man from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we want to see Jesus. Philip comes and tells Andrew, and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus (John 12:20-22).**

This is the only passage in the Bible that mentions those Greeks. They were no doubt proselytes, because they came to Jerusalem so that they might worship at the feast. The Bible commonly refers to all Gentiles as Greeks. Hence, they were not necessarily citizens of Greece. They were probably simply Gentile proselytes who had heard the great things about Jesus, but never had the opportunity to see him.

Jesus was apparently no longer accessible to the people, because those men needed to go through the apostles to see him. Jesus was told they wanted to see him, but they probably did not see him, because they would not have understood the things he was saying. Moreover, nothing more is ever said about them. Perhaps that story is included here simply to show that Jesus had become known internationally.

Seed can only bear fruit by dying

- **And Jesus answered them saying, The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat that falls into the ground dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit (John 12:23-24).**

When that passage says “**Jesus answered them,**” it means he answered Andrew and Philip, the apostles who told him about the Greeks. Those Greeks were probably not present, because what Jesus said would only have confused them. Jesus said those things to help prepare his apostles for his crucifixion, because he knew the time was near.

Jesus used the example of a grain of wheat to show how it was necessary for him to suffer that way. For he could not become our Redeemer unless he obeyed God and submitted to that ordeal. And unless he redeemed us, we would be condemned for our sins and be cast into hell with the devil and the demons. For Jesus, being the only begotten Son of God and a sinless man, he alone was able to become our Redeemer. Therefore, his death enabled him to bear much fruit. That was an excellent analogy to explain to them why he needed to die that way.

Loving life or hating it in this world

- **He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25).**

Jesus spoke similar words that are recorded in two places in Matthew. However, in that book he spoke of finding life and losing it. Here he spoke about loving life or hating it in this world. Thus, Jesus spoke that lesson several different times. And that is no doubt true of most of what he taught. The record of his life in the New Testament is but a small sample of what he did.

Regarding our loving or hating our lives in this world, remember what Jesus said about those who are filled now and who laugh now: “**Woe to you who are filled now, because ye will hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, because ye will mourn and weep**” (Luke 6:25). And remember what he said about those who mourn now: “**Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted**” (Matthew 5:4).

Those who live only to love life and indulge their lusts of the flesh, cannot be serving God. Therefore, they will lose their hope of eternal life. But we who hate our lives in this sinful world, where we must continually struggle against its trials and temptations, will keep it for eternal life.

Serving him means following him

- **If any man serves me, let him follow me, and where I am, there my helper will also be. And if any man serves me, the Father will honor him (John 12:26).**

Following Jesus means to obey his commandments, every one of them. His followers on earth now are with him in spirit. But in the afterlife we will be with him in body also, but not a body of flesh. We will live with a new imperishable body in the capital city of heaven, the new Jerusalem (see Revelation 21) where all who serve him will be honored by God. That is the promise of his magnificent gift for us who remain faithful to him, magnificent beyond measure. And God always keeps his promises.

Hearing words or just noise

- **Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But because of this I came to this hour. Father, glorify thy name. A voice therefore came out of heaven, saying, I both glorified it, and I will glorify again. The multitude therefore that stood by and heard, said thunder occurred, others said, An agent has spoken to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice occurred not for my sake, but for your sakes (John 12:27-30).**

It is interesting that some of the multitude only heard a loud noise, while others heard the words that were spoken to him. The book does not explain the difference, but it may be another example of how people differ in their receptiveness to him.

Some, like the Pharisees, have closed minds and hardened hearts. While others have the childlike spirit that we must have to believe in him. The former only heard a noise; the latter heard the words, and it was to them that Jesus said, **“This voice occurred not for my sake, but for your sakes.”**

That story is a good illustration of how people hear the words of the Bible. For the world, the Bible is only “a loud noise,” without significance or meaning to them. Indeed, for the scoffers of the world it is like this quotation from Shakespeare: “... it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” Macbeth Quote (Act V, Scene V).

But for us who believe, the Bible is the word of God, divinely inspired. We hear what it says, because it is filled with truth and wisdom from our Creator to help enlighten our way in this dark world of sin.

The ruler of the world cast out

- **Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out (John 12:31).**

When God created the world he gave man power over it: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:27-28).

But men have become disobedient to him, and they have chosen instead to serve Satan, God’s great adversary. God remains ruler of the material realm, but Satan is now ruler of

the world of men. God is allowing Satan to rule the world of men because men have chosen Satan and his ways. Therefore, Satan's evil influence is continually being manifested in their sinful lives.

Satan is a powerful creature that came from heaven. He is not only an adversary of God but also an adversary of every righteous soul upon the earth. When Jesus completed his life of perfect obedience to God, he defeated all of the arguments Satan had been using to justify sin by his allies, and condemn us who love God. Therefore Satan was cast out of heaven.

For the book of Revelation says, **“And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought. And he did not prevail, nor was a place found for him any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him.**

“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death” (Revelation 12:7-11).

His death would draw men to him

- **And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. And he said this, signifying by what death he was going to die** (John 12:32-33).

Remember, what Jesus meant by being lifted up was being crucified. And that was his final act of perfect obedience to God, which earned him the right to redeem all who follow him. Jesus said he would draw all men to himself, not forcibly, but by offering salvation to all men who come to him.

Notice how Jesus said, **“if I am lifted up from the earth.”** Jesus' right to offer us eternal salvation was contingent upon his being crucified. That was the last act required of him to prove his perfect obedience to God the Father. And that is how he earned the right to become our Redeemer.

Remember, I explain much more about all of those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Believe in the light and walk in it

- **The multitude answered him, We have heard from the law that the Christ remains into the age. And how can thou say, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?**
- **Jesus therefore said to them, Yet a little time the light is with you. Walk while ye have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. And he who**

walks in the darkness knows not where he is going. While ye have the light, believe in the light, so that ye may become sons of light.

- **Jesus spoke these things, and after departing, he was hid from them (John 12:34-36).**

Remember, reference to the law sometimes refers to the entire Old Testament. And what the people heard about the Christ remaining into the age (not dying) may be this passage from the prophet Ezekiel: **“And my servant David shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in my ordinances, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, in which your fathers dwelt. And they shall dwell therein, they, and their sons, and their son’s sons, forever. And David my servant shall be their ruler forever”** (Ezekiel 37:24-25). Also remember, the Christ was to be a son of David.

Jesus made no attempt to answer their question. They would not have understood what he meant anyway. Instead, he gave them a lesson about the importance of using light. His disciples no doubt understood what he was saying, but the unbelievers among the multitude probably thought he was speaking in riddles. Remember what they said about him when he spoke of shepherds and sheep: **“And many of them said, He has a demon, and is mad. Why do ye listen to him?”** (John 10:20).

Light has always symbolized truth and righteousness, while darkness symbolizes sin and ignorance. Jesus brought the brilliant light of God’s truth and righteousness into the world. And our duty is to walk in that truth and righteousness. Otherwise, sin and ignorance will overcome us. One of the evil consequences resulting from this present generation having forsaken God and the Bible, is not only the increase in sin, but also the increase in ignorance about the spiritual things of man.

The world is in darkness, but we who follow Jesus are in the light, because he is the light of the world. We who follow him love truth and righteousness because we believe in the light and turn from darkness. Therefore, by following him we are becoming sons of light, sons of God for eternity in heaven.

Blinded and hardened

- **But although having done so many signs before them, they did not believe in him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet that he spoke might be fulfilled: Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Because of this they could not believe.**
- **Because Isaiah said again, He has blinded their eyes, and has hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and be turned, and I would heal them. Isaiah said these things when he saw his glory, and spoke about him (John 12:37-41).**

The prophecy about believing the report is this one: **“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed?”** (Isaiah 53:1). The prophecy about blinded eyes and hardened hearts is this one: **“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,**

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Lo, send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:8-10).

Jesus did more than enough mighty signs to prove that God was with him. Yet most of the people did not believe. They did not believe in him because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so they would not see and understand, and be turned for him to heal them.

It is a rare person who believes that God would ever harden hearts so that people would not believe in him. Yet that is exactly what Jesus taught. That fact is clearly shown in the passage quoted from Isaiah.

You may ask, “Why does he prevent some people from believing in him?” He does it so they will not turn and be saved. You may ask, “Why does he not want them to turn and be saved?” For the book of Ezekiel says, **“Have I any pleasure in the death of a wicked man? says the lord Jehovah, and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?”** (Ezekiel 18:23).

God knows the hearts of all men. And there are some who have made their spirits like Satan himself. God does not want men like that to turn and be saved. He does not want the new Jerusalem to be inhabited by Satan and other unworthy souls. He does not want men with permanently corrupted spirits to have eternal life with him in heaven. Therefore, he keeps such men from believing in him so they will not turn and be saved.

Yet people do not want to hear that lesson because they worship mythical caricatures of God and Christ. They have a Santa Claus concept of God, and they think of Jesus as a long-haired effeminate looking pacifist who loves everybody. And if you try to correct them they will hate you and revile you. Try it and you will see for yourself.

Remember, what Jesus said about the way that leads to life: **“Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Matthew 7:13-14).

Loved the praise of men more

- **Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God** (John 12:42-43).

The world is filled with men who do exactly the same thing as what those rulers did. Even when they know the truth they will commonly conceal it when it is unpopular and threatens their positions in life. For example, that is what many modern scientists do who believe in God and doubt Darwinism. They keep quiet about it so they will not be rejected and expelled from their positions.

Believing Jesus means believing God

- **And Jesus cried out and said, He who believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me** (John 12:44-45).

Jesus again told how he was serving the Father, not himself. Therefore, whoever is believing Jesus is believing God the Father. And when we see Jesus (not his flesh but his inner being, his spirit and character) we are seeing God the Father.

No man can see the outer nature of God, but we can see his inner nature, because it was manifested in the life and teachings of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus said to his apostle Philip during the last supper, **“He who has seen me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9). The spirit and character of Jesus is exactly the same as the spirit and character of God. And the spirit and character of Jesus can be clearly seen in the story of his life, which has been faithfully recorded in the Bible for us.

Not remaining in darkness

- **I have come a light into the world, so that every man who believes in me may not remain in the darkness** (John 12:46).

The darkness that Jesus spoke about was our ignorance. And hearing what Jesus taught gives us knowledge of the truth to enlighten our minds. And that brings joy into our hearts because of the hope it gives us. Although it also brings some sadness, because it opens our eyes to see more of the enormous folly, sin, and wickedness of this world. As Solomon said, **“For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow”** (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

A prophecy from Isaiah about the Christ said he was **“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”** (Isaiah 53:3). And one reason Christ was a man of sorrows is because, being the light of the world, he could so clearly see its sin and the harmful consequences of it.

Judging the world

- **And if any man hears my sayings, and will not believe, I do not judge him, for I came not so that I might judge the world, but that I might save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has that which judges him: the word that I spoke, that will judge him in the last day** (John 12:47-48).

In the above passage Jesus gave a warning to every man who hears his sayings and will not believe. Jesus said he would not judge him, meaning he would not condemn him. For Jesus did not come into the world to judge it. He came to bring us salvation from the condemnation of our sins by becoming our Redeemer. The judgment of condemnation for those who will not believe him comes later.

Jesus will judge the world on the great day of judgment, which is called the last day. It is called the last day because it comes right after the world ends.

And we can know beforehand how he is going to judge the world in the last day, because he told us in those words. He will judge the world by the words he spoke here on the earth, both directly and through his apostles, which words are recorded in the New Testament. That means he will judge the world by what the New Testament teaches.

Therefore dear reader, if you want to know how you will be judged on the day of judgment, study the teachings of the New Testament and see how they apply to your life.

God commanded Jesus what to speak

- **Because I spoke not from myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Therefore what things I speak, just as the Father has said to me, so I speak** (John 12:49-50).

Notice how Jesus referred to God as “**the Father.**” He often emphasized how God is our heavenly Father, and we should recognize him that way. He created us in his own image, and he has given us the opportunity to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him. Which opportunity is only through his Son Jesus Christ.

Notice also how Jesus said, “**... what I should say, and what I should speak.**” And the Greek words for “say” and for “speak” are different. The difference between the English words is subtle and of little significance to what is being said. That may also be true of the two Greek words. I suspect Jesus simply used those two words for emphasis, and not to convey some kind of special meaning. Otherwise, I will leave it for the lexicologists.

In that passage Jesus again emphasized that the words he was saying were not his own, but are the words of the Father who sent him. The Father told him what to say, and that is what he did; he obeyed him. And it is through obedience to our heavenly Father that we can all have eternal life, because Jesus said that God’s commandment was eternal life. And by commandment he means everything God commands of us.

The engineers who create machines know how they work. And whoever violates the instructions of the engineers about using their machines will damage them. God is like a great engineer, because he created all things, and he knows how to keep everything working properly. Sin violates his instructions, and consequently causes harm and damage. Sin is the cause of all evil. And let no disciple of the devil delude you into thinking otherwise.

During the last supper

John describes much more about what happened during the last supper (which was just before his betrayal and crucifixion) than the other three biographers of him—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John tells how Jesus taught his apostles many things during that last supper. And most of what he said applies to all of his disciples, and not just to his apostles. There are good lessons for us in all that he taught. And it is our duty to find them, and apply them to our lives.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples

- **Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, having seen that his hour has come that he would depart out of this world to his Father, having loved his own in the world, he loved them to the end.**
- **And supper having occurred, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he would betray him, Jesus, having seen that the Father has given all the things to him, into his hands, and that he came from God, and goes to God, rises from supper, and set his garments aside, and after taking a towel, he girded himself.**
- **Then he pours water into the wash-basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded (John 13:1-5).**

Jesus saw that his hour had come. Remember, he had often said that his hour had not yet come. He used the word hour in a figurative sense, meaning a specific time. His hour was when he was going to be betrayed and crucified. His hour had come, and that also meant he would be departing out of the world to his Father in heaven.

The passage says that he had loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end. Jesus' own are all who believe and obey him, not just his apostles or the other disciples who followed him during that time. That means Jesus loves us and will love us to the end. He will love us to the end of our lives, to the end of the world, and for all time. He will love us because we love him. And about our love for him, he later said, **"If ye love me, keep my commandments"** (John 14:15).

Regarding the matter of washing their feet, Jesus did not teach with his words only; he also taught by example. And washing their feet was a marvelous example of humbly serving others, even when you have authority over them. People during those days commonly wore sandals, which exposed their feet to the dust and dirt of their streets and thoroughfares, which were rarely paved. As a result there was a need to cleanse their feet whenever they entered into a dwelling.

Modern people wear shoes and sox, which protect our feet. And our streets and thoroughfares are not covered with dust. Nevertheless, even shoes can become soiled. That is why it is traditional for oriental people to remove their shoes whenever they enter into a house.

Notice how the passage says that the devil had now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him. The devil had failed in every effort to tempt Jesus to sin. Subjecting him to being arrested and crucified would be the last and greatest trial Jesus would face. And that is no doubt why the devil wanted him crucified. It was his last great effort to defeat Jesus.

If the devil could put evil thoughts in the heart of Judas, he can also put them in our hearts. However, unlike Judas, righteous souls will resist evil thoughts if they love the Lord. Therefore, be not dismayed if you find yourself thinking some evil thoughts. Resist and condemn them all, and ask God to help you. Do not allow them to lead you astray to sin. Fight against them with good thoughts. Remember what Paul said about overcoming evil: **"Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good"** (Romans 12:21).

Regarding the matter of Jesus setting his garments aside, that does not mean he made himself completely naked. For the passage says he girded himself with a towel. And he kept himself covered while we was washing their feet and wiping them with the towel. Even Adam knew that public nakedness was shameful. He knew it because it is natural for us to feel ashamed when naked in public. It was only on the cross that Jesus was seen naked, and that was not according to his will. It was part of the suffering imposed upon him by the evil rulers of the Jews.

Doing only what is needed

- **So he comes to Simon Peter, and that man says to him, Lord, do thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I do thou do not know now, but thou will understand after these things. Peter says to him, Thou may, no, not wash my feet into the age.**
- **Jesus answered him, If I may not wash thee, thou have no part with me. Simon Peter says to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and head. Jesus says to him, He who is bathed has no need to wash the feet either, but is entirely clean. And ye are clean, but not all. For he knew the man betraying him. Because of this he said, Ye are not all clean (John 13:6-11).**

When Peter questioned Jesus wanting to wash his feet, Jesus said to him, **“What I do thou do not know now, but thou will understand after these things.”** That was a personal response to Peter, because he used the singular pronoun thou. Although what he said may have been true of all of them. What Jesus probably meant was simply that he would explain why he was washing their feet after he finished.

The previous passage said that the devil had already put into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. And Jesus knew it, because he said not all of them were clean (meaning without guilt). Yet Jesus still washed Judas’ feet. Jesus was not a hypocrite; he lived by what he commanded us. And he had commanded us to love our enemies: **“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, so that ye may become sons of your Father in the heavens, because he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Matthew 5:44-45).

Washing Judas’ feet was an example of Jesus loving his enemy. It is our heavenly Father’s right to punish our enemies, not ours. And he does it (primarily) through our civil authorities. It is not our right to personally punish them. It is the duty of those in authority to punish the guilty ones.

A command for us

- **When therefore he washed their feet, and took his garments, having sat down again, he said to them, Do ye understand what I have done to you? Ye call me, Teacher, and, Lord. And ye say well, for I am. If I then, the Lord**

and the teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash each other's feet. For I have given you an example, so that just as I have done to you ye also should do (John 13:12-15).

When Jesus asked about understanding what he did to them, he used the plural pronouns ye and you. Hence, he was asking all of them if they understood. Remember, Peter did not understand. Jesus did not wait for a response from them; he explained to them what he did.

Jesus both commanded and gave us an example of washing each other's feet. However, that command should not be taken literally. It is like these commands: **"If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it"** (Matthew 16:24-25). Who literally takes up his cross? Who does not try to save his life in dangerous situations? And as far as literally following Jesus, that is impossible now. Those commands were about broad principles.

And the command and example that Jesus gave about foot washing was also about a broad principle; namely, that of humbly serving to help provide for the needs of others. The practice of washing feet today is not something commonly needed as it was during those times.

Making a ritual out of foot washing is misleading, because it misses the lesson Jesus was making. For when Peter told him to also wash his hands and head, Jesus said, **"He who is bathed has no need to wash the feet either, but is entirely clean."** In other words, there is no need to wash us when we are already clean. The washing of their feet was simply an example of serving a need. It was not a ritual like the Lord's Supper that he established.

Notice how Jesus also reminded them that he was their Lord and teacher. That was to show them that the principle of humbly serving to help provide for the needs of others was to be done by all of them, including their authorities and teachers.

Regarding the modern expression servant-leader, I consider it an oxymoron. Any man in a servant's role is by definition not the leader. He is by definition subordinate. A much better expression is a serving leader, a leader who serves. Jesus was never a servant-leader. He was never a servant to any man, but he certainly did much serving, more than any other man.

Blessed are those who imitate his serving

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, a bondman is not greater than his lord, nor is an apostle greater than he who sent him. If ye have seen these things, blessed are ye if ye do them (John 13:16-17).**

Jesus was truly greater than his apostles. Yet he humbled himself and served them in that simple way. And by learning from what he did, he said we are blessed if we do the same thing: serving to help the needs of each other. We will be blessed by Almighty God. Nevertheless remember, we are always expected to be wise and judicious in whatever we do. Remember the warning he gave about giving: **"Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having**

turned back may lacerate you” (Matthew 7:6). In the same way, we are not obligated to serve unworthy people.

One of them would turn against him

- **I speak not about you all. I have seen whom I chose, but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with me lifted up his heel against me. From henceforth I tell you before it happens, so that when it happens, ye may believe that I am** (John 13:18-19).

The scripture Jesus referred to is from the Psalms: **“Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”** (Psalm 41:9). And he wanted them to know beforehand so that their faith in him would increase not decrease with his betrayal and crucifixion. For their faith was going to be severely tested by his ordeal that way. They had not yet understood all the warnings he gave that it would happen, and they could not understand how such a thing was necessary.

Receiving Christ

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any man whomever I may send, receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me** (John 13:20).

The word apostle means being sent on a mission. Therefore, when we accept the teachings of Jesus’ apostles it is the same as receiving the teachings of Jesus himself. Consequently, whatever is taught in the New Testament by Jesus and his apostles must be considered as comprising the genuine good news of Christ.

Jesus said that he who received any man whomever he would send, received him, and he who received him receives him who sent him, meaning God the Father. That means whoever receives the teachings of the New Testament, receives the teachings of Christ. And whoever receives the teachings of Christ, receives the teachings of God.

And any other teaching by any other man cannot qualify. For the apostle Paul said, **“But even if we, or an agent from heaven, should preach a good news to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, I now also say again, if any man preaches a good news to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed”** (Galatians 1:8-9). Therefore, every man who claims apostolic succession is a liar and a disciple of the devil. Moreover, those who promote false religions like Islam and Hinduism are worthy of a curse.

Jesus tells of his betrayal

- **Having said these things, Jesus was troubled in the spirit, and testified and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me. Therefore the disciples looked at each other, being uncertain about whom he speaks** (John 13:21-22).

Several times Jesus told his apostles that he would be betrayed. This was the first time he said one of them would be the betrayer. The passage says the disciples looked at each other, being uncertain about whom he spoke. That suggests they could not believe that one of them would betray him deliberately. They no doubt thought the betrayal would be accidental.

Notice how the passage also says that Jesus was troubled in the spirit when he said one of them would betray him. Jesus knew from the beginning it would happen, but it still troubled him. God is always troubled in the spirit about sin and wickedness, even though he knows they are going to happen. And when we are about to sin against him, it adds to his troubled feelings. If you love God, then remember that when you are tempted to sin.

Jesus identifies his betrayer

- **And one of his disciples whom Jesus loved was sitting at Jesus' bosom. Simon Peter therefore gestured to this man to inquire whoever he may be about whom he speaks. And that man, having leaned thus toward Jesus' breast, says to him, Lord, who is he?**
- **Jesus replies, He is that man to whom I, having dipped the morsel, will give. And when he dipped the morsel, he gives it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon (John 13:23-26).**

Jesus did not say who was going to betray him. He only said it would be one of them. Matthew tells how each of the apostles asked if he would be the one: **"And as they were eating, he said, Truly I say to you, that one of you will betray me. And being exceedingly sorrowful, they began, each of them, to say to him, Is it I, Lord? And having answered, he said, He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, this man will betray me"** (Matthew 26:21-23).

They were all dipping their hands with him in the dish. And since Jesus did not name which one would betray him, perhaps most of the apostles thought he did not know. Nevertheless, Peter and John had no doubt that Jesus knew who his betrayer was. Peter was bold enough to ask Jesus, but he was not near enough to him to make it private. Hence, he asked John to inquire for him. And Jesus kindly revealed it to them.

Nevertheless, Judas was revealed as the betrayer to them all when he followed the rest of the apostles and asked Jesus if he was the one. That is told in Matthew's biography of Jesus: **"And Judas (the man who betrayed him) having answered, he said, Is it I, Rabbi? He says to him, Thou have said"** (Matthew 26:25). Thou have said means yes.

Jesus told Judas to depart

- **And after the morsel, then Satan entered into that man. Jesus therefore says to him, What thou do, do more quickly. But no man who was sitting knew why he said this to him. For some thought, since Judas had the purse, that Jesus said to him, Buy what things we have need of for the feast, or that**

he should give something to the poor. Therefore having received the morsel, straightaway that man went out, and it was night (John 13:27-30).

When the passage says that Satan entered into Judas, it means the spirit of Satan entered his mind and his heart to influence his thoughts and his actions. Satan can do that with men whose hearts are receptive to him. He tries to do it with us, but we resist him. Judas was “in tune” with the spirit of Satan, which made Judas receptive to him. I speak much more about the nature of spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Luke’s biography of Jesus tells how Satan entered into Judas on the day he first went to the chief priest and captains to offer to betray Jesus to them (see Luke 22:3-4). Why Satan entered into Judas after he took the morsel is not clear. Perhaps it means Satan began to arouse him to begin the betrayal. Apparently Satan does not remain in a man, but his spirit enters into him whenever he wants to arouse him for some evil deed. And perhaps because Jesus continued to show kindness to Judas, Satan may have been concerned that Judas might change his mind. Therefore, he aroused him to go and begin the betrayal.

Jesus probably commanded Judas to do what he would quickly because he wanted to speak to his loyal apostles about many things before he was arrested that night. And Judas did not deserve to hear what he was going to say to them. Therefore, he told Judas to depart. Both Jesus and Satan influenced Judas. Satan aroused him to betray Jesus, while Jesus determined when he would do it.

When Judas heard the command, he immediately departed from them. He doubtless did not want to be there anyway. He did not fit; he was out of his element. His heart and mind contrasted too much with theirs. Jesus had included him with his other apostles only so that the scripture about his betrayal would be fulfilled (see John 17:12).

Judas had corrupted his spirit beyond repair. For even though he had seen the mighty works of miracles and compassion that Jesus did, yet he remained alienated in his heart from him. And there are many men in the world with that kind of corrupted spirit. Like Judas, they are hopelessly incapable of being worthy of salvation.

Glory to Christ and to God

- **When he went out, Jesus says, Now the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorify in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him straightaway** (John 13:31-33).

God and his Son Jesus Christ are so united in spirit that when one is glorified the other is glorified. The Son of man, Jesus Christ, was glorified by completing his life as a man of flesh with perfect obedience to God. His crucifixion was the climax of that perfect life. And since God sent him and commanded those things of him, then God was also glorified in the perfect life of his Son. Moreover, after that perfect life on earth, God raised up Jesus to glory in heaven to reign over all things with him.

When Jesus completed his life of perfect obedience to God, even enduring crucifixion, that proved his complete moral and spiritual superiority. That brought glory to him. And it also brought glory to God, because that enabled God, through his Son, to condemn all of his enemies and give eternal sonship to all who love him. And he could then do it with per-

fect justice and impartiality. I explain much more about those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Going where they could not come

- **Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, Where I go, ye cannot come, I also now say to you (John 13:31-33).**

Remember, that was a riddle Jesus had spoken earlier to the people. Where Jesus was going that they could not come was, of course, back to his Father in heaven. Nevertheless, even his apostles did not understand what he meant by going where they could not come, and he did not explain it to them. Perhaps he wanted them to remember what he said after his crucifixion and understand then. That would help them realize he knew exactly what would happen to him.

Referring to other men as little children was an expression of the highest affection toward them. And Jesus indeed had the highest affection toward his faithful apostles. They had continued faithfully with him during all of his trials. They too had endured the contempt and rejection of their chief priests and rulers. They had given their lives to him. Therefore, he had the highest affection for them. And we too can earn his highest affection by living faithfully for him and his kingdom.

Jesus commands us to love each other

- **A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other. By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other (John 13:34-35).**

Jesus did not just command them to love each other. He commanded them to love each other the way he loved them. He remained their Lord, yet he always lived and taught for their benefit. He sometimes chided them, and he sometimes tested them, but he always loved them because they remained faithful to him. And his love was not the superficial kind of love that exists between most of the people of the world.

When we show his kind of love for each other, the world will know that we are truly his disciples. For that is how he wants us to be toward each other. In another book John wrote more about that, saying, **“Beloved, we should love each other. Because love is of God, and every man who loves has been begotten of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

“By this the love of God was made known in us, because God sent his Son, the only begotten, into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son, an atonement for our sins.

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are obligated to love each other. No man has ever seen God. If we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is in us, having been fully perfected” (First John 4:7-12).

That kind of love unites us together into a very powerful bond. And that unity gives us great strength. Hence, it is having the kind of love that Jesus has that gives us great strength as well as great joy. And when the world sees that kind of camaraderie, unity, and spiritual strength, then they can know that we are truly his disciples.

Nevertheless remember, that kind of love demands full obedience to the commands of Christ. For he said to them a little farther on, **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15). John also said in another book, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man”** (First John 2:3-4). No man genuinely loves Christ unless he keeps his commandments.

Following Jesus

- **Simon Peter says to him, Lord, where do thou go? Jesus answered him, Where I go, thou cannot follow me now, but thou will follow me afterwards** (John 13:36).

They did not understand that Jesus meant he was going back to his Father in heaven. Following him afterwards meant they would also be raised in their spirits to live in heaven with him after their earthly lives were over.

Jesus did not elaborate about what he meant by them not being able to follow him where he was going. There were too many other important things he needed to tell them without having to explain all that he meant. They would remember what he said to them, and they would understand later after his resurrection.

Jesus prophesies Peter's denial of him

- **Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thee. Jesus answered him, Will thou lay down thy life for me? Truly, truly, I say to thee, A cock will, no, not sound, until thou will deny me thrice** (John 13:37-38).

Peter was always zealous for and fully committed to Jesus. I have no doubt he spoke the truth when he said he would lay down his life for him. For in his later years he did die for the cause of Christ. The other three biographies of Jesus mention how Peter disputed with Jesus about denying him (see Matthew 26:33, Mark 14:29, and Luke 22:33). Here is Matthew's report of it: **“If all men will be caused to stumble by thee, I will never be caused to stumble”** (Matthew 26:33).

I believe Jesus allowed him to be tempted to deny him in order to humble him, so that he would learn not to challenge Jesus anymore. And after that happened Peter never did. For after Jesus resurrection, he asked Peter three times if he loved him. The record says that Peter was grieved the third time, and when he answered Jesus, he said, **“Lord, thou know all things. Thou know that I love thee”** (John 21:17).

Regarding the details of Peter's denial, according to Matthew, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that in this night, before a cock sounds, thou will deny me thrice”** (Matthew

26:34). According to Mark, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to thee, that thou today, in this night, before a cock sounds twice, will deny me thrice.”** (Mark 14:30). According to the passage in Luke, Jesus said, **“I say to thee, Peter, a cock will, no, not sound today, before thou will thrice deny that thou know me”** (Luke 22:34). And according to John, Jesus said, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, A cock will, no, not sound, until thou will deny me thrice”** (John 13:38).

All four biographers report Jesus saying (1) Peter would deny him, (2) he would deny him before a cock sounded, and (3) he would deny him three times that night. However, Mark reported Jesus saying that Peter would deny him thrice before a cock sounded twice. And in his testimony he does mention a cock sounding twice. Mark also told how Peter denied Jesus once before a cock sounded the first time. I explain that difference in my comments about Mark’s report of those things.

Preparing a place for us

- **Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will take you along to myself, so that where I am, ye may be also** (John 14:1-3).

Those great promises were given not just for his apostles. but for all of his faithful disciples. And I can think of no greater blessing we could ever receive than what he promised in those words. And the more faith and trust we have in him, the greater comfort we have in them. For those words give us a hope that cannot be surpassed. The world can scoff and laugh now, but when that time comes their laughter will become **“the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 8:12). Trust him, lest thou be among them.

When Jesus spoke of his Father’s house with many dwellings in them, he was not speaking of a house as we think of one. During Bible times the temple was called God’s house. However, when this world is over and we live with him in heaven, the temple there will be the new Jerusalem. And according to the testimony of the book of Revelation, we will dwell with him in the new Jerusalem. Moreover, the record says that city will be exceedingly huge. That is where the dwellings will be that Jesus went to prepare for us.

Incidentally, the KJV translates the Greek word to say mansions instead of dwellings. That may sound more impressive, but it is not the correct meaning of the word. It is another example of adding commentary instead of accurate translation.

The way, the truth, and the life

- **And ye know where I go, and ye know the way. Thomas says to him, Lord, we know not where thou go. How can we know the way? Jesus says to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me** (John 14:4-6).

Regarding the way that Jesus spoke about, Thomas was thinking in physical terms, while Jesus was thinking in spiritual terms. The way of Jesus is a way of life, a manner of thinking and of living. And thinking and living like him is the way to eternal life.

In order to explain what Jesus meant, he replied to Thomas, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”** He is the truth because everything he taught was from the Father, who is the source of all truth. For Paul said that we have **“been united together in love, and for all wealth of the full assurance of understanding, to knowledge of the mystery of the God and Father and of the Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Colossians 2:2-3). And Jesus is the life because he is not only the author of it, but we can only have life, eternal life, through him. There is much deep meaning in all those words, about which I write much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Remember, dear reader, it is only through Jesus that we can come to the Father and have eternal life. Any man who thinks there are many paths to God is denying what Jesus said. Beware, and let not the devil and those deluded by him mislead you. Notice what Peter said to the rulers of the Jews, **“And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). No man comes to the Father, except by Jesus Christ.

Seeing the Father

- **If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also. And from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.**
- **Philip says to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus says to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and thou do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. And how can thou say, Show us the Father? (John 14:7-9).**

Jesus answered Philip’s request to see the Father with the words, **“Have I been so long a time with you, and thou do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father.”** However, Jesus certainly did not mean *he* was the Father. Instead Jesus was asking Philip if he did not yet know him (Jesus), because knowing him means knowing the Father. And knowing the Father was seeing him. Hence, Jesus could say, **“He who has seen me has seen the Father.”** In other words, he who knows Jesus, knows the Father.

Jesus was using the word see in the sense of knowing; he was equating the words see and know. As Jesus used them, to see is to know, and to know is to see. And that can only be done conceptually, meaning in our thoughts and our ideas. That is how we can see the Father through his Son Jesus Christ. We see the Father by knowing Jesus. And we know Jesus by perceiving his inner being, the character of his spirit, from how he lived, from his words and his deeds.

Therefore, Jesus could say, **“If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also. And from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.”** What Philip wanted was to see the Father in the form of his outer appearance. Philip wanted to see the Father with the eyes of his flesh. But Jesus was showing them the greatest part of the Father; namely,

his inner being, the nature and character of his Spirit. And that is the most beautiful and wonderful part of him.

Indeed, our spirit is the most important part of us. For it is the only part of us that can inherit eternal life. As Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **"... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability"** (First Corinthians 15:50).

And consider what the author of Hebrews said about the relationship of Jesus with God the Father. He said that Jesus was the **"radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence"** (Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, Jesus could say, **"He who has seen me has seen the Father."** And when we see Jesus (conceptually) from the words of the New Testament, we are also seeing God the Father.

Being in the Father and the Father in him

- **Do thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me. But if not, believe me because of the works themselves** (John 14:10-11).

When Jesus said that he was in the Father, and the Father was in him, he was speaking about how completely united they were in their spirits. Jesus was in the Father and the Father in him, the same way the Father is in us and we in him. For the apostle John said, **"No man has ever seen God. If we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is in us, having been fully perfected. In this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us from his Spirit"** (First John 4:12-13).

Notice what John said about God (the Father) and us: **"... we abide in him and he in us ..."** And that is what Jesus said about him and the Father: **"I am in the Father, and the Father in me,"** and, **"... the Father who dwells in me ..."** Jesus, the Father, and we his disciples, all being in each other means we are united together in oneness.

And Jesus later prayed for that oneness later during the time of the last supper: **"And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me."**

"And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Notice how Jesus said about us, **".... so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us ..."** Therefore, what Jesus meant by being in was being united with.

And Jesus once again confessed that the sayings he spoke to them were not his words but were the words of the Father. He also said that the works he was doing were not his works,

but the works of the Father who dwelt in him. He always gave the Father credit for what he was doing, both in his words and in his deeds.

Jesus also said to his apostles what he said to the Jews. That if they did not believe he was in the Father and the Father was in him, then they should believe him because of the works themselves. The mighty works that Jesus had been doing were clear proof that God was with him, which meant God supported what he was saying. Remember what Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, said to Jesus when he came to him, **“Rabbi, we know that thou have come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs that thou do if God is not with him”** (John 3:2).

Jesus never wanted men to believe in him only. He wanted them to believe in him so that they could accept the word of God that he was proclaiming. Believing in Jesus without obeying the will of God is a dead faith, as James said, **“But do thou want to know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is dead?”** (James 2:20).

Doing greater works

- **Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, that man will also do. And he will do greater than these, because I go to the Father** (John 14:12).

The works that Jesus did was to promote truth and righteousness. His mighty works of healing were simply a part of it. Jesus had those powers and he gave them to his apostles and to some of his other disciples while the church was beginning. God no longer gives men those powers. Those powers served an important purpose then, but now we have the entire record of the word of God. That is sufficient to develop faith in Christ, for anybody who loves truth and righteousness.

In that passage, when Jesus said “he” and “that man” he was no doubt speaking generically, referring to the combined efforts of those who believe in him. Because there never was a man who did anywhere near the mighty works that Jesus did, nor will there ever be.

The works that those who believe in him do will also promote truth and righteousness just as Jesus did, although not with his miraculous powers. And the greater works that Jesus said we will do are the result of our combined efforts. For consider all of the worldwide good works and fruits for righteousness that his genuine disciples have done through the centuries since. And I am persuaded there will be even greater such things in the future.

Whatever we ask in his name

- **And anything whatever ye may ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye will ask me anything in my name, I will do it** (John 14:13-14).

What Jesus said about asking and receiving applies to all who believe and obey him. Notice in that short passage how Jesus repeated twice his promise to do whatever we ask in his name. Many times Jesus made that promise to us. And it is repeated in other books of the New Testament. Nevertheless, we must have faith that he will give us what we ask

(if it is according to his will). When he loves us he will give us what we ask in his name, as long as what we ask is good and right and just, and if we are patient about it.

Moreover, we are expected to do our part to obtain what we ask. And the major part of that is to put his kingdom and righteousness first in our lives (see Matthew 6:33). No man should expect God to drop blessings down upon his lap while he just sits by doing nothing. When Jesus works to bless us, we must work as well.

Jesus said he will do what we ask so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Jesus always emphasized glorifying his Father in the heavens.

Keep his commandments

- **If ye love me, keep my commandments** (John 14:15).

It is impossible to keep his commandments without loving him, because he said a little farther on, **“He who does not love me does not keep my words.”** Moreover, it is also impossible to love Jesus without keeping his commandments. Those who think they can are deluded. Genuine love for him and obedience to him always go together. For those who genuinely love him, it is impossible not to keep his commandments, because that spirit of love in us compels us to want to obey him.

It is like the spirit within Jeremiah that compelled him to obey Jehovah and prophesy against the people, even though they persecuted him severely. Jeremiah said about that spirit, **“And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot”** (Jeremiah 20:9).

Moreover, the more we learn about the commandments of Jesus and obey them, the more we show our love for him. And the only way to know his commandments now is to learn the teachings of the New Testament, because it is the ultimate source of all our knowledge about Christ and his kingdom.

Giving us another helper

- **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you** (John 14:16-18).

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit. The name Holy Spirit is usually referred to in the neuter gender. But sometime it is also in the masculine gender, and the Greek word for helper in that passage is in the masculine gender. However, the Greek word for spirit in the phrase Spirit of truth is in the neuter gender. Jesus said the Holy Spirit was the Spirit (neuter gender) of truth, and it was a helper (masculine gender).

Hence, the Holy Spirit is referred to in both the masculine and neuter genders. However, both God and Christ are always referred to in the masculine gender. Nowhere in the entire Bible is God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit referred to in the feminine gender.

There is much that is mysterious about the Holy Spirit. I devote an entire chapter about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I will only say here that the Holy Spirit seems to be a special force that is part of God himself, but also has an individual identity. Jesus was begotten from God, but nothing is said about the Holy Spirit ever being begotten. Jesus also has an individual identity, but unlike the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not part of God himself. He is a separate being, having been begotten from God. Moreover, the book of Revelation tells more about the heavenly world than any other in the Bible, yet the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in it.

The Holy Spirit is a helper for us and a helper for Jesus also. It helps him by helping us. It helps us by arousing our spirit to obey his commandments, and that seems to be done through our conscience. The Holy Spirit also helps us to know what those commandments are, which may be why it is called the Spirit of truth. It helps us know those commandments because it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the New Testament was written.

The Holy Spirit of God not only helps us know about those commandments for us, but it also reveals to us much more about the greater spiritual reality, such as who God is and what he is like, what our purpose is in life, and how to have eternal life. For it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the Bible was written.

And only we the disciples of Christ receive the Holy Spirit within us. It is the dynamic force of God and from God to reside in us. For the world cannot receive it. They cannot receive it because it is holy, and they are unclean, not having been purified by the sacrifice of Jesus.

The last things in the above passage were words of encouragement for his apostles, apparently given because of the great emotional stress they were soon going to face. He assured them they would not be abandoned. They needed to be assured because he was soon going to be crucified.

Seeing and living in him

- **Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more, but ye see me. Because I live, ye will also live. In that day ye will know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you (John 14:19-20).**

Jesus never appeared again in public after his resurrection. He only appeared to some of his disciples. And his resurrection would prove to them that they would have eternal life. They too would be resurrected, resurrected in spirit for eternal life in heaven with him.

And after his resurrection they would then know how intimately associated they were with him and his Father. They would know about their oneness. And that knowledge was probably a combination of seeing him alive after his crucifixion, together with the divine knowledge they would receive from the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended back to heaven.

When Jesus spoke of “that day” he was referring to the era of his church. Remember, in the Bible the word day often means a span of time and not just a 24 hour period.

Obeying, loving, dwelling

- **He who has my commandments, and keeps them, that man it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. If any man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make a dwelling with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words** (John 14:21-24).

Twice in that passage Jesus said that their obedience is what indicates their love for him. Many people claim to love Jesus, but only a few really do. Only a few truly love him because only a few obey all of his commandments.

Just consider the simple command for believers to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins. The great majority of those who claim to believe in him fail to obey that command. They either sprinkle or pour a little water on the believer and then claim that is enough. Or they dismiss the command altogether, saying it is not necessary. Nevertheless, notice how Jesus emphasized that keeping his word and obeying him is the proof of our love for him.

For we who truly love him, Jesus said that both he and his Father will love us and will dwell with us. Their Spirits dwell in us while we are in this sinful world. But in the after-life both our spirits and our new bodies will dwell together with them in the new Jerusalem in heaven. I also speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Not his but the Father's

- **And the word that ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me** (John 14:24).

Notice how Jesus again told how the word that they heard from him was not his, but was the Father's who sent him. Many times Jesus told how it was the Father who sent him. Here are a few examples:

I can from myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I seek not my will, but the will of the Father who sent me (John 5:30).

Because I have come down from heaven, not so that I might do my will, but the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).

My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me (John 7:16).

If God were your Father, ye would love me, for I came forth and have come from God. For, neither have I come for myself, but he sent me (John 8:42).

Jesus always elevated the Father above him. He never claimed equality in authority with his heavenly Father. What he taught them was not his but the Father's who sent him.

The helper will teach you

- **I have spoken these things to you while remaining with you. But the helper, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you** (John 14:25-26).

Those words were for both his apostles and for us. The Holy Spirit, through the power of divine inspiration, reminded his apostles of all that Jesus said to them. For example, the apostle Paul said regarding the things he taught about the good news, **“For I make known to you, brothers, the good news that was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it was through revelation of Jesus Christ”** (Galatians 1:11-12). And much if not all of the revelation of Jesus Christ that Paul received was through the helper, the Holy Spirit of God.

And we are also made aware (reminded) of the teachings of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, because it was by his inspiration that the New Testament was written. And it is from those words that we acquire our knowledge of the good news of Christ and his kingdom.

The peace and security that Jesus gives

- **Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be cowardly** (John 14:27).

Faith in Jesus Christ gives us an inner peace that the world can never give. Indeed, Paul said it was a peace that surpasses all understanding. For he said to the brothers at Philippi, **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7).

We are to be bold in our faith and confidence toward him; we are not to be cowardly. For God told the apostle John, during his great vision of heaven, that cowards would be among those cast into hell: **“But for the cowards, and unbelieving, and sinful, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”** (Revelation 21:8).

Seeing the boldness of our faith and trust in God is a sign to the world of their destruction and our salvation. For Paul also said to the Philippians, **“Only be citizens worthy of the good news of the Christ, so that, whether having come and having seen you or being absent, I may hear things about you that ye stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the good news.”**

“And not being frightened in anything by those who oppose, which is indeed a sign of destruction to them, but to you of salvation, and this from God” (Philippians 1:27-28).

We must be bold in our faith and not cowardly. Being cowardly is an indication of lack of faith and unwillingness to obey. And one kind of cowardice is conforming to the worldly

philosophy of “Hear no evil; see no evil; speak no evil.” Cowards live by that philosophy so they can avoid the persecution that goes with exposing and combatting evil. They no doubt deny they are cowards, but they prove they are by their actions.

He warned them beforehand

- **Ye heard that I said to you, I go, and I come to you. If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced because I said I go to the Father, because my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, ye might believe (John 14:28-29).**

Jesus was warning them of his imminent departure from them. He had told them several times while they had been with him that it would happen. And because now was the time, he was warning them in order to help protect and preserve their faith in him.

Notice how Jesus said that if they loved him, they would have rejoiced because he said he was going to the Father. He said they would have rejoiced because the Father is greater than he. His crucifixion will seem to the world to be a great defeat for him. Yet because the Father is greater than he, God will raise him up and take him to heaven afterward. And that is why they should have rejoiced. If they loved him, and they truly did, they would have rejoiced that what seemed to be a great defeat was actually a great victory for him.

Although they did not yet understand, he wanted them to have enough faith to appreciate (because the Father is greater than he) that what the world thought was a great defeat, was actually a great victory. For his crucifixion was the climax of his life in the world of perfect obedience to the Father. And because the Father is greater than he, God would bring him up to heaven and reward him for his perfect obedience with the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him and give them eternal life. His victorious life also brought victory over Satan, as well as great glory to both him and the Father.

He endured because he loves the Father

- **I will no longer speak many things with you, for the ruler of the world comes. And he has nothing on me, but that the world may know that I love the Father. And as the Father commanded me, thus I do.**
- **Arise, let us go from here (John 14:30-31).**

Jesus led his apostles out of the upper room while he continued to teach them. However, he had little time before his betrayal, and so he would no longer speak many things with them.

Notice how Jesus said the ruler of the world was coming. The ruler of the world is the devil. Yet Jesus was betrayed by men, not by the devil himself. Satan is the ruler of the world of men. And men with his spirit in them were coming to kill Jesus. Satan is the ruler of the world because men have chosen to serve him. Therefore, he uses them to do his evil deeds. As Paul said, the devil is **“the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2).

Satan had no just accusation against Jesus, but Jesus would allow himself to be killed anyway to prove to the world that he loves the Father. For it was God who commanded Jesus to allow himself to be crucified. God is not he who did that great injustice. The disciples of the devil did it, but God commanded Jesus to endure it.

The grapevine and the farmer

- **I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me not bearing fruit, he removes it. And every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit. Now ye are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you (John 15:1-3).**

That analogy is such a simple yet beautiful way to help us understand our relationship with Jesus and his Father in heaven. For one thing it illustrates how his Father is superior to him and he is superior to us. He is superior to us the way the grapevine is to the branches. For no branch can survive and produce without being attached to the grapevine. Notice how Jesus said it was his Father who managed the grapevine. For God is the manager of his Son Jesus Christ.

Bearing fruit for righteousness is absolutely necessary for our spiritual survival, because God removes every soul from the kingdom of God that does not bear fruit. And like a loving father on the earth, he helps us remove our bad habits and other bad things that interfere with our fruitfulness.

The cleanliness Jesus spoke about was the cleanliness of our eternal spirits. The words of Jesus make us clean when we accept them and use them to help us forsake our sins.

The branches of the grapevine

- **Dwell in me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it dwells in the grapevine, so neither ye, if ye do not dwell in me. I am the grapevine, ye are the branches.**
- **He who dwells in me, and I in him, this man bears much fruit, because without me ye can do nothing. If any man does not dwell in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and are burned (John 15:4-6).**

With those words, Jesus explained and amplified what he had said about a grapevine. Just as Jesus emphasized his subservience to the Father, so also he emphasized our subservience to him. For without our subservience to him we are fruitless and doomed to be burned, burned in the eternal fires of hell. But as long as we dwell in him with our faith and obedience, we will bear much fruit.

The fruit we bear is good deeds of righteousness, of whatever kind we have the opportunity and capability to perform. A mother bears fruit by working to bear and raise righteous children. A father bears fruit by working to develop the resources of the earth that God has given us. And we all work to promote Jesus and his church, within the roles we are allowed.

Therefore, the stronger we adhere to Jesus Christ and his teachings the more fruit we will bear. That means it is vital for us to study his teachings and learn from his examples. Thus, Bible study is like a proper diet for children. It keeps our spirits healthy and strong, and enables us to grow.

Our knowledge of him and his word is like the life support the branches receive from the grapevine. It is like the power cord that enables electrical devices to operate. Never disconnect yourself from frequent study of the Holy Bible. Otherwise the character of your spirit will gradually weaken and may eventually perish.

Ask and it will be done for us

- **If ye dwell in me, and my sayings dwell in you, ye will ask whatever ye may want, and it will be done to you** (John 15:7).

Several times Jesus promised to do whatever we ask of him. He will do whatever we ask of him as long as we remain faithful to his commandments. He will do whatever we ask of him as long as we keep working to promote his truth and righteousness. He will do whatever we ask of him as long as we keep our faith and wait patiently for him.

Being disciples means bearing much fruit

- **By this my Father is glorified, that ye may bear much fruit, and ye will become my disciples** (John 15:8).

Our living righteously and productively, bearing much fruit, is how the Father is glorified. When people see us living righteously and productively, and they know it is because we belong to God, then they will think highly of him.

And the opposite happens when we live unrighteously. For Paul rebuked the hypocrites among the Jews, when he said, **“Thou who boast in law, dishonor God by thy transgression of the law. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written”** (Romans 2:23-24).

Jesus said bearing much fruit was how to become his disciples. That means we become his disciples in fact and not in name only. A disciple is a man who commits himself to follow behind (literally or figuratively) someone else. Only by following Jesus, bearing much fruit for truth and righteousness, do we become his disciples in fact.

Obey to dwell in his love

- **As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Dwell ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye will dwell in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and dwell in his love** (John 15:9-10).

Love is not just talk. It is both desiring good for someone else and doing good for them. And as God desired good and did good for his Son Jesus Christ, so Jesus desired good and did good for his apostles. And what he said to them applies to all of us who believe in him.

Dwelling in his love means to accept him and the good that he does for us, and to live by it, by his love. And that means keeping his commandments, because he said that was how to dwell in his love: **“If ye keep my commandments, ye will dwell in my love ...”** We can dwell in his love, just as he dwells in the Father’s love, by keeping his commandments, because that was what he did.

Notice how Jesus emphasized the necessity of obeying the commandments—his commandments for us and the Father’s commandments for him. For that is the only way to dwell in their love. No man can dwell in Christ’s love by faith only. And every man who genuinely loves Christ wants to obey his commandments, because that is how we do him good and glorify him.

Having his joy in us

- **These things I have spoken to you that my joy may dwell in you, and your joy may be full** (John 15:11).

His disciples were going to have much sorrow because of his crucifixion. However, after his resurrection their sorrow would turn to joy. And their joy would include the joy of Jesus dwelling in them to make their joy full.

What Jesus meant by his joy dwelling in them was for them to have the same kind of joy that he had. The joy Jesus spoke about was the inner joy of the spirit, not the pleasures of the flesh. That inner joy is the greatest kind. It is a joy that the sinners of the world cannot experience, nor can they understand. Jesus had that joy and he wanted to share it with us. And he will share it with us as long as we remain faithful to him.

Although Jesus was called a man of sorrows in this world (see Isaiah 53:3), he is also the source of all joy. For it is only through him that we can have eternal life in heaven, which will be a life of endless joy with God and Christ.

Another word for joy is happiness. Men champion the pursuit of happiness, but Jesus did not. Joy and happiness are not things to pursue, but consequences of living righteously. When Jesus was speaking about providing for the needs of our bodies, he said, **“For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that ye need all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”** (Matthew 6:32-33). And in the same way, pursuing joy and happiness should not be a priority for us.

Jesus said he spoke those things to them that his joy would dwell in them, and their joy may be full. And in the same way, our joy and happiness are made full by hearing and obeying the word of God, which is what Jesus spoke to them. And obeying the word of God means doing good, living righteously, and being productive and fruitful.

Those things are truly a great source of joy for those who love him. And no man can take that joy from us. Our bodies will suffer from time to time in this life, but our souls will always have the fullness of the joy of Christ dwelling in us. And when this life and its sorrows and pains are over we will have endless joy with God and Christ in heaven. Our joy will truly be full then.

No greater love

- **This is my commandment, that ye love each other, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that some man lay down his life for his friends** (John 15:12-13).

Several times Jesus commanded us to love each other, just as he loved us. And the New Testament record of his life is filled with stories showing how he loves us. The greatest evidence of it is that he gave up his life willingly so that he could earn the right to redeem our souls from the condemnation of our sins. It was the greatest love he could show us.

Notice how Jesus spoke of a man laying down his life for his *friends*, which is what he did for us. He did not lay down his life for the unrepentant sinners of the world. They remain condemned to the judgment of hell. For his redeeming salvation is only for those who belong to him, to those who are his friends. And every man decides for himself whether he will be a friend of Jesus or not. For God is not partial. The choice is ours to make. Nevertheless remember, that choice is the most important one we will ever make, because it will determine our eternal destiny. **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 11:15).

Being a friend of Jesus

- **Ye are my friends, if ye do as many things as I command you. I no longer call you bondmen, because the bondman does not know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, because all things that I heard from my Father, I made known to you** (John 15:14-15).

The love of Jesus is not unconditional. The modern idea of unconditional love has never been part of the kind of love taught in the Bible. That foolish concept was invented by an atheist who was promoting the ideology of humanism, and the false idea that everybody is basically good and deserves being loved unconditionally. Jesus emphasized that his love for us was definitely conditional; it is conditional upon our obedience to his commandments.

If we are faithful to his commandments then Jesus will not only love us, but he will make us his friends. He and the Father created us; they own us. Yet he will call us his friends if we do what he commands us. Who would reject the opportunity to have the wealthiest and most powerful man in the world to be our friend? Some of us would reject such an opportunity if it required us to do wrong. But Jesus only requires us to do right to become his friend. And he is exceedingly more wealthy and powerful than any man, because everything belongs to him; God the Father has given all things to him.

Bondmen are hired hands used to serve their employers and masters. They are expected to do what they are told without explanations. And their employers and masters do not confide in them. However, Jesus has honored us by calling us his friends. And he has confided to us all things that he heard from his Father in the heavens. And knowledge of those things is now found in the words of the New Testament.

Nevertheless, it is still our duty to serve him. As Paul said to the brothers at Philippi, **“Paul and Timothy, bondmen of Jesus Christ, to all the sanctified in Jesus Christ**

who are at Philippi, with the guardians and helpers ...” (Philippians 1:1). Paul said they were bondmen, but we are not bondmen of Christ in the sense of being simply employees of him. We are bondmen in the sense of being obligated to willingly obey and serve him as his friends and brothers. There are many kinds and degrees of bond service.

Bear fruit and we receive whatever we ask

- **Ye did not choose out me, but I chose out you, and appointed you, so that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit may remain, so that anything whatever ye may ask of the Father in my name, he may give you** (John 15:16).

Jesus chose his apostles and appointed them to bear fruit that would endure. He chose them directly while he was upon the earth because they had a vital mission in the establishment of his church. And he chose them by the kind of spirit they had within themselves, such as what he said to Nathaniel, whom he later appointed to be one of his apostles. When Jesus first met him, he said, **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit”** (John 1:47).

And that is how Jesus chooses us: by the kind of spirit we have in ourselves. He will choose whoever makes his spirit worthy of eternal sonship with God. As Paul said to the brothers at Colossae, **“Put on therefore, as chosen men of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering ...”** (Colossians 3:12).

Jesus does not choose us individually the way he chose his apostles. He chooses whoever qualifies as his sheep. Whoever has the right kind of spirit and character is chosen by him; he chooses by the quality of our spirit. And remember, even though he chose his apostles individually, they had to willfully follow him; none of them were forced. So too, we must willfully follow him.

And having been chosen, we are consequently appointed to also bear fruit, fruit for righteousness. Remember, Jesus said that was how God the Father was glorified, by the good fruit that we would bear. And our fruitfulness endures, unlike the vain fruitfulness of the world, which always eventually perished. For our fruitfulness is spiritual, contributing to the salvation of souls for eternity, including our own.

And by living that way, just as Jesus promised that the Father would give his apostles whatever they asked in his name, so also God will give to us whatever we ask in Jesus’ name. Nevertheless remember, what we ask must be according to his will, things that are good and right and just.

Moreover, it must be according to his purpose for us. For God did not even give his Son Jesus Christ everything he asked for. Jesus asked to be spared his trial and crucifixion (see Matthew 26:39), but it was God’s will that he endure it. Therefore, even if we ask him for something that is good and right and just, he may not give it because it is not according to his purpose for us.

Obey so that we may love each other

- **These things I command you, so that ye may love each other** (John 15:17).

The commands of Jesus were given to encourage us to love each other. Everything that Jesus did and commanded was for our benefit. And one of the great benefits of being a faithful disciple of Christ is that we love each other. We love each other with a genuine and undying love that gives us the kind of trust and confidence in each other that the world cannot know.

That is why it is so important for us to purge out the frauds and hypocrites in our midst. For they undermine that love. A lack of church discipline is perhaps the major reason why modern Christians do not have the kind of love for each other that Jesus commanded. For we cannot trust everyone while so many of the frauds and hypocrites are tolerated as part of our assemblies.

The New Testament elsewhere gives instructions about church discipline. But I wanted to mention it now to explain why we do not have the kind of love for each other that Jesus commanded. For remember, the entire teachings of the New Testament contain his commands. And there are many places in it that command us to be strict about maintaining discipline among us. Tolerance of sin and hypocrisy among us makes it dangerous to show the kind of love for each other that Jesus wants. Jesus never tolerated such things.

Who the world loves and hates

- **If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world (instead I chose you out of the world), because of this the world hates you (John 15:18-19).**

Anyone with eyes can see that the world hates us. They hated Jesus so much that they crucified him after only three years of his ministry. False teachers would have us believe that it was only the Roman government that hated Jesus. The truth is that almost all of the rulers of the Jews as well as the great majority of the population hated him.

How many Jews protested his crucifixion? Their rulers gloated about it, and the population was indifferent. Indeed, it was a multitude of the Jews that pressured the Roman governor Pilate to have him crucified when he wanted to release him.

Therefore dear brother, be not surprised if the world hates you. If we belonged to the world they would love us. Look at those that the world loves; they are part of the world, but we are not. The world can see that we are not part of them, and that is why they hate us, especially when we rebuke and expose their evil. For sinners hate being rebuked and exposed.

Expect persecution

- **Remember the word that I said to you, A bondman is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you because of my name, because they have not known him who sent me (John 15:20-21).**

Jesus never concealed the great costs of what it would be like to be his disciple. He always warned of them. And since he himself was persecuted, he said that we should also expect to be persecuted. Since the world rejected his teachings about God and his righteousness, then we should also expect our teachings about God and his righteousness to be rejected. When we walk in his steps we are also going to suffer.

False teachers who proclaim that being a Christian will give us the greatest joy and happiness in the world are not telling the truth. What they teach is not the genuine good news of Christ, but a perverted doctrine crafted to please people, and themselves.

Obedience to the genuine good news of Christ will only give us joy and happiness in our spirit, because our flesh will inevitably suffer. For Paul said the two are against each other: **“But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:16-17).

And that conflict between our spirit and our flesh will bring us suffering, not joy and happiness. Remember what Jesus said about our lives in this world: **“If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 16:24-25).

The world persecuted Jesus and it will persecute us because they do not know God. They may know some superficial things about him from the words of the Bible, but their knowledge is shallow and full of error. The god they know is a myth. And they cannot accept the truth about the real God of the Bible, the true and living God.

No excuse for their sin and hate

- **If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no other man has done, they would not have had sin, but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father. But, that the word that is written in their law may be fulfilled, They hated me without cause** (John 15:22-25).

When Jesus said they would not have had sin if he had not come and spoken to them, he did not mean they would have been sinless. It means they would not have had sin about him. If Jesus had not spoken to them, and had not done the works that no other man has done, then they could not be condemned for rejecting him. They would not be guilty of hating him, hating both him and God the Father.

For when they saw what Jesus was like, and what he taught and did, they were seeing the Father through him. And having hated what they saw and heard in Jesus, meant they also hated the Father. The god that those sinful Jews loved and worshiped was not the true God. They thought they were worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they really did not know him. The god they worshiped was actually the devil.

The expression **“hated me without cause”** is contained in two of the Old Testament psalms. Here is one of them: **“Let not those who are my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me. Neither let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause”** (Psalm 35:19). Here is the other: **“Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head”** (Psalm 69:4).

Notice how Jesus said that statement was written in their law even though it was not part of the law of Moses. The words of the entire Old Testament were commonly called the law. Those words were called the law because they contain other things that God wants us to obey. Here are only two examples: **“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother”** (Proverbs 1:8), and, **“And what does Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?”** (Micah 6:8).

Jesus will send the Spirit of truth

- **But when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, that will testify about me. And ye also testify, because ye have been with me from the beginning** (John 15:26-27).

Remember, the helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit, and it proceeds from the Father. A spirit is energy, and the Holy Spirit is a special spirit from God that is given only to those who belong to Christ. I explain much more about the nature of spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus said that special spirit called the helper would testify about him. The helper would testify about him, first through the divinely inspired teachings of the apostles, and second by providing miraculous powers to them. The apostles would be able to testify about Jesus, not only because they were eye witnesses of what he did during his ministry, but also because of receiving special supernatural powers of the Holy Spirit, the helper that Jesus would send to them.

Stumble not at persecution

- **I have spoken these things to you, so that ye may not be caused to stumble. They will make you excommunicated from the synagogues. But the hour comes that every man who kills you will presume to be offering service to God. And they will do these things, because they have not known the Father nor me** (John 16:1-3).

Jesus was warning them beforehand about the severe persecutions they would face. He was warning them beforehand, not to discourage them, but to prepare them so they would not stumble in their faith when it happened. Remember, the Jews had already begun to excommunicate all who confessed him: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43).

When the leaders of the Jews killed Jesus they thought they were serving God, because they accused him of blasphemy. And many other Jews thought they were serving God when they killed his disciples. The Roman Catholics killed many faithful protestant Christians because they thought that was service to God. And even today many Christians are being killed by those who think they are serving their god. There is no other religious belief that has been persecuted more than genuine faith in Christ.

Sinners persecute us because they are ignorant of God and Christ. They are ignorant because they do not want to know them. They do not want to know them because they love sin and darkness, and they reject all efforts to encourage them to repent.

Why he did not speak earlier

- **But I have told you these things, so that when the hour comes, ye may remember that I told you of them. But I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you. But now I go to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, Where do thou go? But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart** (John 16:4-6).

Jesus did not tell those things to them from the beginning, because he was with them. However, now that his hour had come, he was telling them so that they would remember he told them about those things.

The crucifixion of Jesus would be a great emotional trauma for his apostles because they did not yet understand the true nature of the kingdom of God. In fact, just before his ascension into heaven they said to him, **“Lord, do thou restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?”** (Acts 1:6). They never did understand until after his ascension into heaven. And none of us would have understood them either if we had lived then. It was just too different from what was expected of the Messiah.

Therefore, Jesus was preparing them for his imminent death. Jesus knew his words filled their hearts with sorrow, but those words were necessary to help prepare them for this great trial of their faith. For when it happened they would remember he told them.

Jesus said that none of them asked him where he was going. However, earlier during the last supper the record says that Peter did ask him: **“Simon Peter says to him, Lord, where do thou go? Jesus answered him, Where I go, thou cannot follow me now, but thou will follow me afterwards”** (John 13:36). And Thomas said to him, **“Lord, we know not where thou go. How can we know the way?”** (John 14:5).

They were puzzled about what he meant, but apparently they were reluctant to continue questioning him about it. That is what Jesus meant by none of them asking where he was going. There were other times when they failed to understand what he said, and he rebuked them for it. Consider for example this passage: **“And they forgot to take loaves, and they did not have with them in the boat except one loaf. And he commanded them, saying, Take heed, watch for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they deliberated among each other, saying, We have no loaves.”**

“And knowing it Jesus says to them, Why do ye deliberate because ye have no loaves? Do ye not yet perceive nor understand? Have ye your heart still hardened?”

Having eyes, ye see not, and having ears, ye hear not? And do ye not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did ye take up? They say to him, Twelve. And when the seven for the four thousand, how many hampers full of fragments did ye take up? And they said, Seven. And he said to them, How do ye not understand?” (Mark 8:14-21).

Perhaps also they were so troubled and confused by his warnings they did not know what to ask. Being troubled and confused and facing the unexpected can indeed paralyze the mind.

The helper will convict the world

- **Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I depart, for if I do not depart, the helper will not come to you. But whenever I go, I will send him to you. And having come, that will convict the world about sin, and about justice, and about judgment.**
- **About sin because they truly did not believe in me, and about justice because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more, and about judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged** (John 16:7-11).

It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to be crucified. Otherwise he could not have completed his mission to become our Redeemer. And unless that was done we would all have remained condemned for our sins. For God could not justly condemn the devil and all of his disciples for their guilt without also condemning us for our guilt. Only by being redeemed can we escape the condemnation of our sins.

Jesus, by remaining without sin, while enduring every trial and temptation in obedience to the commands of the Father, including his crucifixion, Jesus earned the right from God to redeem us. He did not take our punishment for us; he earned the right to redeem us.

After Jesus returned to heaven he was going to send them the helper, the Holy Spirit. And that would give them both power and knowledge; divine power for miracles to prove that God was with them, and inspired knowledge for them to teach the will of God to the people. Those things were needed to build Christ's church and to write the word of God for us in the New Testament record.

Jesus said the helper would convict the world (1) about sin, (2) about justice, and (3) about judgment. The helper will convict the world about sin because they did not believe in the Son of God, a truly mortal sin. Many people believe in a mythical character they call the Son of God, but they do not want to believe in the true Son of God. For whenever the true Jesus Christ is presented to them from the New Testament evidence, they become offended and reject him. Just as those ancient Jews did with the true Christ.

The helper will also convict the world about justice. Every soul in the world has become guilty of sin. And justice demands the punishment of guilt. However, Jesus took us out of the world and freed us from our guilt by becoming our Redeemer. And that fulfilled justice because God owed Jesus the right to redeem us. God owed him that right because he earned it by his perfect obedience to God.

The helper will also convict the world about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. God gave the world to mankind, but they have chosen the devil to be their ruler. Satan was judged unworthy to remain in heaven when Jesus proved that a sinless life on earth was possible. And because Jesus redeemed those who belong to him, Satan could no longer accuse us, nor could he defend himself. Therefore, Satan was cast out of heaven to the earth (see Revelation 12). I have written much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

He will guide you into all the truth

- **I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. However when that, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak from himself, but as many things as he may hear, he will speak. And he will report to you the things that are coming.**
- **He will glorify me because he will receive from me, and will report to you. All things, as many as the Father has are mine. Because of this I said that he takes from me, and will report to you** (John 16:12-15).

Jesus could not reveal everything to them at that time because they were not ready. When the Spirit of truth came to them after Jesus' ascension into heaven, that enabled them by divine inspiration to understand all the truth, all the truth about the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God.

And just as with Jesus, what the Spirit of truth spoke to them was not his. He spoke to them the things he heard (from the Father through the Son). And he enabled them to prophesy of things coming. What the Holy Spirit said and did brought glory to Jesus, because the Holy Spirit received from him. For all things that the Father has were given to his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the helper and the Spirit of truth. He is a helper of God and Christ because he resides in us (see First Timothy 1:14) guiding our hearts to live righteously. He does that through the knowledge we have of the word of God, and the desire of our consciences to do right.

Regarding truth, it can refer to that which is factual, but in the Bible it often refers to the knowledge of what is good and right and just. And in that sense the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. It is the Spirit of truth because it is through the Holy Spirit that we learn truth.

All of the words of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the energy that God used to inspire his prophets to provide our knowledge of spiritual things and his will for us, which we find in the Bible. And because it resides in us, it also interacts with our thoughts and our feelings to help us be faithful to God.

Remember what Jesus said to them about that: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). And in another book John said, **“And he who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he**

in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, from the Spirit that he gave us” (First John 3:24).

Not seeing and then beholding

- **A little while, and ye do not see me. Again a little while, and ye will behold me, because I go to the Father. Therefore some of his disciples said among themselves, What is this that he says to us, A little while, and ye do not see me, and, Again a little while, and ye will behold me, and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore What is this that he says, A little while? We know not what he says** (John 16:16-18).

Those words were like a riddle to them. The **“little while, and ye do not see me”** was after he was crucified and placed in the sepulcher. The **“little while, and ye will behold me”** was when he appeared to them after his resurrection. However, they did not understand his words until those things happened. The riddle was not made clear to them until they saw that he had been raised from the dead. Jesus no doubt spoke that riddle to them so that after his resurrection they would have further evidence that he knew exactly what was going to happen. And that would strengthen their faith in him.

Incidentally, the Greek words for “behold” and for “see” are different. That is why I chose those different English words in my translation, *A Conservative Version*. However, the subtlety of the difference in the Greek words can only be appreciated from the context. They would see him in the flesh for a little while. But then they would behold him both in the flesh and in the power of his resurrection. They would behold with a greater appreciation for him as the Son of God.

They will feel anguish like a woman giving birth

- **Therefore Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them, Do ye inquire among yourselves about this, because I said, A little while, and ye do not see me, and, Again a little while, and ye will behold me?**
- **Truly, truly, I say to you, that ye will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. Ye will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will become into joy. When a woman brings forth she has pain because her hour has come. But when she has given birth to the child she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a man was born into the world.**
- **And now therefore indeed ye have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no man takes your joy away from you** (John 16:19-22).

They were puzzled about what Jesus said, and he knew it. However, instead of explaining what he had already told them many times (that he was going to be killed but would rise the third day) he encouraged them by saying their sorrow would become into joy. And then he used the example of a woman delivering a child. Virtually every woman suffers

anguish during that process. But they forget that anguish because of the joy they have when the child is born and they hold it in their arms.

I remember watching the birth of a child on a TV program. (The private parts of the woman were properly covered from the camera.) She struggled and agonized during the delivery. However, after she was holding her newborn child in her arms, she said, "Oh, it was worth it. I would do it again!" Jesus said that reversal of feeling would happen to them: sorrow forgotten and replaced with joy. And he emphasized that blessing by saying no man would take their joy away from them.

Here was Jesus about to experience a horrible time of great suffering, and yet he was encouraging his apostles about the much smaller suffering they would experience. That is just one more example of the vastly superior character and spirit of love and righteousness that he has.

Again he told them to ask to receive

- **And in that day ye will ask me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, that as many things as ye may ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now ye have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye will receive, so that your joy may be made full (John 16:23-24).**

And again Jesus assured them they would be given as many things as they would ask of the Father in his name. Several times Jesus assured them of that. They could be sure he would do what he said even if he only said it once. But Jesus gave that assurance several times to encourage them. They had not asked anything in his name before then because he had been with them.

Jesus encouraged them to ask so that they would receive and their joy would be made full. And I have no doubt our Father in the heavens will give whatever we ask him in Jesus name, as long as it is right and good and just. Remember however, he always answers our prayers in his own time and way. For he knows best how to bless us.

Nevertheless also remember, we are still going to suffer various afflictions in this life. Consider this example of how God answered the prayers of Paul and his co-workmen about a time they had suffered: **"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about our affliction that happened to us in Asia, because we were extraordinarily weighed down, above strength, so as for us to despair even to be alive.**

"But we ourselves have had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we should not be trusting in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Who rescued us out of so great a death, and does rescue, in whom we have hoped that he will also still rescue" (Second Corinthians 1:8-10).

No longer veiled words

- **These things I have spoken to you in veiled words. The hour comes, when I will no more speak to you in veiled words, but will inform you plainly about the Father (John 16:25).**

Many times during Jesus' ministry his disciples asked him to explain his words. He would usually explain them, but sometimes he did not. However, after his ascension into heaven he spoke to them through the helper, the Holy Spirit that would be in them. Through that divine inspiration Jesus made knowledge about God and his good news of salvation plain to them.

Remember what Paul said about that: **"For I make known to you, brothers, the good news that was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it was through revelation of Jesus Christ"** (Galatians 1:11-12).

The Father loves you because ye loved me

- **In that day ye will ask in my name, and I do not say to you, that I will pray the Father about you, for the Father himself loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.**
- **I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world. Again I leave the world, and go to the Father** (John 16:26-28).

After Jesus returned to the Father in heaven he would not need to pray to him about his disciples. They would not need to pray to Jesus, but could pray directly to God the Father. And that is true for us as well. As long as we ask in Jesus' name, we can pray to the Father directly. We can pray to him directly because of our special relationship with him as children of God through his Son Jesus Christ. He loves us because we love his Son Jesus Christ, and we believe that he truly came into the world from God.

Although we can pray directly to the Father in Jesus' name, Jesus is still our mediator between us and the Father. As Paul said to Timothy, **"For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ ..."** (First Timothy 2:5).

And what Jesus said about the Father loving them applies to us as well. God our heavenly Father loves us because we have loved his Son Jesus Christ, and have believed that he came forth from God, that he came forth from the Father, and came into the world. And that he left the world, and went to the Father in heaven, there to prepare a place for us (see John 14:2).

They confessed their faith in him

- **His disciples say to him, Lo, now thou speak plainly, and speak not one veiled word. Now we know that thou know all things, and have no need that any man should question thee. By this we believe that thou came forth from God** (John 16:29-30).

There were many things Jesus said to them that they did not understand. In the passage above they said that they finally understood him and believed what he said about himself. Those men remained faithful to him for the rest of their lives, even though they suffered much persecution because of it.

They will soon leave him alone

- **Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour comes, and now has come, that ye will be scattered, each man to his own things, and ye will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me (John 16:31-32).**

Jesus' encouraging words had a positive effect on them: they were encouraged in their faith about him. However, Jesus continued to warn them of the terrible stress they were going to experience. He even told them they would abandon him and be scattered apart.

But he also told them he would not be alone, because the Father was with him. When Jesus was on the cross, he said **"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46). That did not mean the Father was not with him. Jesus asked that question aloud for us. Jesus wants all of us to ask why God forsook him to be crucified. God forsook him that way so that his Son Jesus Christ could qualify to become our Redeemer and save our souls.

God could easily have spared him that ordeal. Indeed, all that Jesus needed to be spared was to ask him. For when he was being arrested, he said, **"Or do thou think that I cannot now call my Father, and he will provide to me more than twelve legions of agents? How then would the scriptures be fulfilled that it is necessary to happen this way?"** (Matthew 26:53-54). God did not spare him because he loves us, and he wants us to share eternal life with him in heaven. And that was the only way he could save our souls, by being redeemed through his Son Jesus Christ.

Our world of tribulation

- **These things I have spoken to you, so that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).**

Jesus always sought the welfare of his disciples. The words of warning and encouragement that he spoke to them were so that they might have peace, the inner peace of their spirits.

We have tribulation in the world because it is a world of tribulation, especially for those who believe and obey him. For Paul said, **"If we are men who have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men more miserable"** (First Corinthians 15:19). In other words, if we have no hope for the afterlife, then we are suffering and sacrificing in vain. We might as well live for our fleshly pleasures like the rest of the world. As Paul also said, **"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"** (First Corinthians 15:32). Why should we forsake our worldly life, if we cannot find it for the next life?

Remember these words of Jesus: **"And he who does not take his cross and follow behind me, is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it"** (Matthew 10:38-39). If those words are not true, then let us eat and drink and be merry. But they are true, and we do have hope of a better life in heaven.

Jesus overcame the world by his perfect life of self-sacrifice in obedience to the Father. He proved it was possible to live a sinless life. And he proved his complete moral and spiritual superiority. Thereby earning him the right to redeem our souls, and to sit upon the throne at the right hand of God. He also defeated Satan, which defeat caused him to be cast out of heaven.

Giving glory and eternal life

- **Jesus spoke these things, and he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that the Son may also glorify thee, just as thou gave him authority over all flesh, so that all things that thou have given him, he will give them eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they should know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou sent (John 17:1-3).**

Those words began the great prayer that Jesus made when he was with his apostles just before his betrayal. It was a personal prayer, but he spoke aloud so that his apostles could hear him. He asked the Father to glorify him, not because he wanted glory for himself, but so that he could glorify the Father. Jesus glorified the Father by his complete obedience to him. And we too can glorify our heavenly Father by our complete obedience to him. And when we glorify God that way, he will glorify us in heaven.

Jesus said that God had given him authority over all flesh. Jesus is the **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”** (Revelation 19:16). Yet he lived the life of a poor man in the world, and allowed sinful men to persecute and crucify him. And the reason was so that he could give eternal life to those whom God had given him. He came into this world to defeat sin, and to earn the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

Knowing the only true God, and his Son Jesus Christ, is the way to eternal life. But that knowing is not just an intellectual process; it is an integrating process. It is a uniting of ourselves with them. When the Bible says a man knew his wife, that means he became physically united with her. Knowing God and Jesus Christ means becoming spiritually united with them.

The glory Jesus had before the world

- **I glorified thee on the earth. I finished the work which thou have given me that I should do. And now, Father, glorify thou me with thyself with the glory that I had with thee before the world was (John 17:4-5).**

Jesus continually honored his heavenly Father, always giving him credit for what he was able to do. He also continually said that the words of his good news of salvation were not his, but were from the Father who sent him. He always glorified God and gave him the full credit.

Jesus said he had finished the work that God gave him to do. The termination and pinnacle of his work was his submission to crucifixion. And that was imminent. His work was to enable the development of the kingdom of God, composed of all the sanctified souls of the

world. For they would become sons of God for eternity. Without Jesus' work on the earth that would not have been possible.

Jesus also mentioned the glory he had before the world was. Remember what John said about him at the beginning of this book: **"This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be"** (John 1:2-3).

Together with the Father, Jesus created all things. The power and glory necessary to do such a mighty work is beyond our ability to comprehend. The glory that Jesus had was beyond astronomical. Yet he humbled himself to live and suffer in this world as he did, so that he could save our souls for eternal glory in heaven with him. Dear brothers, how can we not love him?

The men God gave him

- **I manifested thy name to the men whom thou gave me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gave them to me, and they have kept thy word** (John 17:6).

God is the ultimate source of all things. Even Jesus came from him, because he is his only begotten Son. And sons always come from their fathers. God knows the hearts of every man. He knows those who love truth and righteousness, and those who love sin and darkness.

It is sad but true that most of the world loves sin and darkness. But God has chosen out of the world those who love truth and righteousness. And he has given them to his Son Jesus Christ. And because they love truth and righteousness they obey the words of God, which words promote truth and righteousness.

What Jesus had God gave him

- **Now they know that all things, as many as thou gave me are from thee. Because the sayings that thou gave to me, I gave to them. And they received them, and knew truly that I came forth from thee, and they believed that thou sent me** (John 17:7-8).

Jesus knew the hearts of his faithful apostles (Judas had already departed). And here he expressed his confidence in the faith his apostles had in him. They believed him when he said the sayings he gave to them were from God. For they were convinced that he truly did come from God, and that God had sent him.

They believed him because they were of his sheep. They had the right kind of spirit within them. They were humble men who loved truth and righteousness. The one exception among the apostles was Judas Iscariot who had a corrupted spirit. For he never did love Jesus and believe in him.

His apostles had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. They had heard his words and seen his mighty works. And that was all they needed to know that he was truly sent by God. Judas had also heard and seen those things, but he had no love of truth and

righteousness. He had the heart of the devil, the great creature who has both seen and spoken with God in heaven, but still hates him. Like the devil, Judas loved sin and darkness. For John said that Judas **“was a thief, and he had the purse and removed things that were put in”** (John 12:6). Yet he pretended to be a faithful apostle of Christ.

Praying for them not the world

- **I pray about them. I do not pray about the world, but about whom thou have given me, because they are for thee** (John 17:9).

Notice how Jesus said he was praying about his disciples and not about the world. He was praying about his disciples because they love truth and righteousness, while the world loves sin and darkness. His disciples believe in him and love him, while the world has no faith in him and they hate him. His disciples obey him as their Lord, while the world has made Satan their lord. For remember, Jesus called Satan the ruler of the world.

Having all things jointly with God

- **And all my things are thy things, and thy things are my things, and I am glorified in them** (John 17:10).

Jesus is completely united with God, and they share jointly all things. They are even more united than the ideal one flesh of a husband and his wife (see Genesis 2:24). Nevertheless remember, as the husband is head of his wife so also God is the head of Christ.

Jesus was glorified in his disciples, because it was through them that the kingdom of God, Christ's church, was established and grew.

He prayed for their oneness

- **And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name that thou have given to me, so that they may be one, just as we.**
- **While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name. Whom thou gave to me, I kept, and none of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction, so that the scripture might be fulfilled** (John 17:11-12).

When Jesus said he was no more in the world, he meant he would make no more public appearances. He was ready to be betrayed and crucified. After that he would be resurrected from the dead, and then appear for a few days to some of his disciples so they could testify of his resurrection. Finally, he would leave the world by ascending into heaven in the sight of his disciples.

And he prayed the Father to keep them in his name, to protect and preserve them. Notice again that Jesus confessed that his disciples were given to him by God. Everyone who loves truth and righteousness belongs to God, and they are the kind of souls that come to Jesus. They are the sheep who hear his voice and follow him. And he prayed they would be as united together in oneness as he and the Father were.

Jesus protected and preserved them in the Father's name while he was with them, but he would soon depart. Therefore, he prayed the Father to protect and preserve them. The only one of them he did not protect and preserve was Judas, because Judas was not of his sheep. Judas was chosen to fulfill the scripture that prophesied of Christ's betrayal.

That prophecy apparently came from this scripture: **"Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9). And Jesus chose Judas to be one of his apostles to fulfill that scripture. Remember, Jesus said to his apostles, **"I speak not about you all. I have seen whom I chose, but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with me lifted up his heel against me"** (John 13:18).

Words to fulfill joy

- **And now I come to thee. And I speak these things in the world, so that they may have my joy fulfilled in them** (John 17:13).

What Jesus spoke in the world was his good news of our salvation. He brought that message, because he wanted to have his joy fulfilled in his disciples. Having his joy fulfilled in us may mean that the salvation of our souls fulfills his joy. For we will be his friends and brothers to reign with him in the new Jerusalem of heaven. It will be joy to him that we will be with him there because he loves us. Having his joy fulfilled in us may also mean he wants us to share the great spiritual joy that he has with the Father.

We are not of the world

- **I have given them thy word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world** (John 17:14-16).

The world hates us because we have the word of God within us, and we use it to guide our lives. They hated Jesus and persecuted him because he was not of the world. And they hate us because we are of him and so are not of the world. The world loves deceit and sin, but we condemn those things, and love truth and righteousness. Therefore, they hate us.

Jesus does not want all of us to leave the world, but he does want us to be kept from the evil. We cannot escape all evil, because this is a world of tribulation. But we can avoid falling into evil by seeking to avoid temptations.

God's word is truth

- **Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is truth** (John 17:17).

Being sanctified means being set apart and made holy. Jesus prayed that God would set us apart and make us holy in his truth. The word of God contained in the Holy Bible is truth. It is truth because it reveals to us the true reality of existence. It reveals to us who God really is and what he is like. It reveals to us why the world was created. It reveals to us why we live and what our purpose is. It reveals to us the best way to live. It reveals to us

some things about the greater spiritual world. It reveals to us how we can live with God for eternity in his greater world of heaven. It reveals the truth to us about many other things. It is the ultimate source of truth in this dark world of sin.

Sanctified in truth

- **Just as thou sent me into the world, so also I sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they may also themselves be sanctified in truth** (John 17:18-19).

Jesus was soon leaving the world. He had appointed twelve men to be his apostles, and he trained them during his three year ministry. He was going to use them (all except Judas his betrayer) after his departure to continue the work of evangelizing the world.

Jesus was an example for them, having chosen them out of the world. For their sakes (and ours) he came to the earth, and set himself apart from the world, teaching and proclaiming the word of God. Remember how he said he was not of the world: **“They are not of the world just as I am not of the world”** (John 17:16)

By following him faithfully throughout all his trials and temptations, his apostles were made holy and set apart. They were sanctified through their acceptance of the knowledge of the truth that he both demonstrated and proclaimed.

Perfected in oneness

- **And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me.**
- **And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me** (John 17:20-23).

We believe in Jesus Christ through the words of his apostles. For they are the ones whom Jesus commissioned to proclaim his good news of our salvation. Developing faith in Christ through the words of other men must only come when their words proclaim the genuine good news of Christ, which are recorded for us in the New Testament. For it is only through their testimony, which information is recorded in the New Testament, that true faith can develop.

The doctrine of Apostolic Succession is a false one invented by the kind of aggressive men that Jesus warned about. No man has the right to claim he speaks for Christ beyond the word of God in the New Testament. Such arrogant claims are fulfillment of this scripture: **“And from the days of John the immerser until now the kingdom of the heavens is treated aggressively, and aggressors seize it”** (Matthew 11:12). Aggressive men seize the kingdom of the heavens by such things as claiming to be successors to the apostles.

Trust in the word of God instead of the bold claims of men, and your faith will be protected from their aggression.

Jesus said the glory that God gave to him, he has given to them, so that they will be fully perfected in one. Their oneness would show the world that Jesus truly came from God, and that God loved them, just as he loved Jesus.

Seeing the glory of Christ in heaven

- **Father, whom thou gave to me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with me, so that they may see my glory that thou have given me, because thou loved me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).**

Jesus was returning to the Father in heaven. He was returning to the glory the Father had given him before the world began. Part of that glory was the body he had in heaven, which was probably in “suspended animation” while his spirit was in the world in a body of flesh.

The apostle John describes a little about that glorious body, which he saw at the beginning of his great vision of heaven: **“And I turned there to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, resembling a son of man, he who was clothed down to the foot, and girded about with a golden belt at the breasts.**

“And his head and hair were white as wool, white as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet resembling highly refined metal, as in a furnace having been fiery hot, and his voice as the sound of many waters, and having in his right hand seven stars, and a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. And the sight of him was as the sun shines in its strength” (Revelation 1:12-16).

Jesus prayed to God the Father that they be with him in heaven. And he meant all of his faithful disciples, not just his apostles. For remember what he said before that: **“I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one”** Living with Jesus for eternity in heaven is the great hope he has given us. And regardless of the suffering we may experience in this life, that hope will never fail us.

Knowing the Father and having his love

- **And righteous Father, the world does not know thee, but I know thee, and these know that thou sent me. And I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, so that the love that thou loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:25-26).**

The world has great ignorance about God. The devil and those who serve him have been very successful in blinding mankind and leading them astray. Satan has cast great clouds of dust into the air to keep men from seeing clearly. Those clouds of dust are the countless false ideas and beliefs about who God is, what he is like, and what his will is for us. And the world is filled with them.

But Jesus was actually with God in heaven, even before the world began. Therefore, he knows him with great personal intimacy. And his faithful apostles had seen enough of Jesus to know that God had truly sent him. Their faith had developed into knowledge because of all the evidence they had seen and heard. That evidence was clear proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

Jesus said he made known to them the name of God and will make it known. Remember, a name symbolizes identity. For example, Adam gave names to the beasts that God created for him in the garden of Eden (see Genesis 2:19). And when Jesus said he made known to his apostles the name of God, he was saying he revealed to them the true identity of God. He revealed to them what God was really like.

Jesus revealed to them what God was really like so that the kind of love that God has for him would be in them and he in them. Jesus wants us to be united in oneness with him and the Father, with the same kind of love that he and the Father have toward each other and toward us.

Those words of Jesus ended his prayer heard by his apostles during the night of the last supper.

Jesus goes to the garden where he is betrayed

- **After speaking these things, Jesus went forth with his disciples on the other side of the brook Kidron, where there was a garden into which he entered, he and his disciples.**
- **Now Judas, the man betraying him, had also known the place, because Jesus also often gathered there with his disciples. Judas therefore having received the band and subordinates from the chief priests and the Pharisees, comes there with lanterns and torches and weapons (John 18:1-3).**

The brook Kidron is on the east side of Jerusalem not far from the temple. The text says that Jesus often gathered in a garden there with his disciples. Therefore, Judas knew where to lead the band that night to arrest Jesus. The Bible does not say how many men were in that band, but it must have been a large number. For they would face not only Jesus but the eleven apostles. And they no doubt expected a conflict and a struggle when they tried to arrest him.

The band meets Jesus

- **Jesus therefore knowing all the things that were coming upon him, after going forth, he says to them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus says to them, I am he. And Judas, the man betraying him had also stood with them. When therefore he said to them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground (John 18:4-6).**

Since Jesus knew what was going to happen, when the band met him that night in the dark of the garden, he knew they were looking for him. The reason they went backward and fell

to the ground was probably because they were very fearful, having heard that Jesus had miraculous powers. Consequently, those in the front, who were closest to him, were startled and stepped backward. And if the band had huddled together because of their anxiety in the darkness, they would have fallen like dominos when the men in front went backward, the men behind them not having room to move their feet.

Jesus protects his apostles

- **Again therefore he questioned them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus answered, I told you that I am. If therefore ye seek me, allow these men to go, so that the word that he spoke might be fulfilled, Of whom thou have given me, I lost, no, not one of them** (John 18:7-9).

No doubt the reason Jesus kept asking them who they wanted was to divert them away from his apostles. He did not want any of them to be harmed or arrested with him.

The **“word that he spoke”** being fulfilled was during his last prayer with his apostles. He said to his Father about them, **“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name. Whom thou gave to me, I kept, and none of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction, so that the scripture might be fulfilled”** (John 17:11-12). The only one of them he did not protect and preserve was Judas, because Judas was not of his sheep. Judas was chosen to fulfill the scripture that prophesied of his betrayal.

Peter uses his sword

- **Simon Peter therefore, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s bondman, and cut off his right ear. Now the servant’s name was Malchus. Jesus therefore said to Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath. The cup that the Father has given me, shall I, no, not drink it?** (John 18:10-11).

All four of the biographers mention that event, but only John gives the names of the high priest’s bondman whose ear was cut off. He also gives the name of the man who cut it off, who was, as expected, the ever zealous Peter. Notice how Jesus reminded his apostles that the Father had commanded him to surrender to the leaders of the Jews (the cup to drink). The biography by Luke tells why the apostles had a sword with them (see Luke 22:36-38). Luke also tells how Jesus restored the man’s ear (see Luke 22:51).

Jesus would not allow his apostles to defend him by force. Therefore, he commanded them against it. During his trial Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus answered him, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here”** (John 18:36). That is why the church does not use carnal force in its war against evil. For ours is a spiritual war, a war for the minds and souls of men, not their bodies only.

God did not force Jesus to submit to his trial and crucifixion. And no doubt he would have saved Jesus if he had asked him. However, Jesus chose to suffer that way so that he could fully obey God and give us the way of salvation. For that was the only way we could be

redeemed from the condemnation of our sins with the devil and the demons. And that salvation had been prophesied from the beginning.

Moreover, his suffering that way had also been prophesied. For Isaiah said about him, **“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth”** (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus is taken away

- **So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound him, and led him away first to Annas. For he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the man who counseled the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people** (John 18:12-14).

Binding Jesus was not necessary because not only had he voluntarily submitted to his arrest but he was surrounded by armed men. Binding him was just another way to humiliate him. Jesus was so hated by the Jews that they used every opportunity to humiliate him. And those things made it even more difficult for Jesus to endure the cup that the Father gave him.

Every high priest was required to be a descendant of Aaron, the original high priest. Caiaphas was the high priest that year, but Annas was also a high priest. Since there were now many men who had descended from Aaron, the high priests were obviously rotating the office among them.

Peter and John follow

- **And Simon Peter followed Jesus, also the other disciple. But that disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter had stood near the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper and brought in Peter** (John 18:15-16).

That “other disciple” was obviously the apostle John. Remember, John never identified himself directly in this book. He calls himself either “the disciple whom Jesus loved” or “the other disciple.”

John was known to the high priest, which meant he had less to fear from the Jews. He also had extra privileges, such as being allowed into the courtyard of the high priest. And he used that privilege to also give Peter access to that courtyard. How John was known to the high priest is never told. Perhaps he was related to him through the marriage of one of his kin. Or perhaps he knew him through a friendship John had developed with someone who knew the high priest or was related to him. There are endless conjectures we could make, but they are all irrelevant to what we need to know.

Peter denies Jesus

- **Therefore the servant girl (the doorkeeper) says to Peter, Are thou not also of this man's disciples? That man says, I am not. Now the bondmen and the subordinates had stood, having made a fire of coals because it was cold, and they were warming themselves. And Peter was also standing with them warming himself (John 18:17-18).**

Remember, Jesus had prophesied that Peter would deny him thrice that night. This was his first denial. In this time of his confusion, danger, and emotional stress Peter had forgotten that prophecy. No doubt at the time he considered the denial to be a prudent response to protect himself. And that is a very common response people make when they are asked about their relationship with Jesus. They either deny having a relationship with him or they belittle it. Doing so is a safer and more prudent response to protect against persecution.

It is another way the sheep are separated from the goats. It is ironic that Jesus' sheep are the ones who risk persecution by boldly proclaiming their allegiance to him. Remember, by challenging Jesus, Peter had acted more like a goat, and he needed humbling.

Jesus is questioned

- **The high priest therefore asked Jesus about his disciples, and about his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spoke in public to the world. I always taught in a synagogue, and in the temple where the Jews always gather together, and I spoke nothing in secret. Why question thou me? Question those who have heard what I said to them. Behold, these know the things that I said (John 18:19-21).**

The answer that Jesus gave was not only objective but it was a more reliable way to obtain accurate information. Evidence about a man is always obtained best by interviewing other observers. And every court that seeks the truth does it that way.

Jesus is slapped

- **And when he said these things, one of the subordinates standing by gave a slap to Jesus, saying, Answer thou the high priest this way? Jesus answered him, If I spoke wrongly, testify about the wrong, but if correctly, why strike me? Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest (John 18:22-24).**

That response by one of the subordinates is another example of the hatred the Jews had of Jesus. Not only did the man slap Jesus in violation of law, but the high priest did nothing about it.

Jesus response to that abuse was to attempt to reason with the man. He not only asked him the man why he struck him, but he told him the right way he should have responded if Jesus spoke wrongly. And we too should attempt to reason with those who abuse us.

Peter again denies Jesus

- **Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. Therefore they said to him, Are thou not also of his disciples? That man therefore denied, and said, I am not. One of the bondmen of the high priest, being a kinsman of him whose ear Peter cut off, says, Did I not see thee in the garden with him? Peter therefore denied again, and straightaway a cock sounded (John 18:25-27).**

See my comments at John 13:37-38 about Jesus prophesying that Peter would deny him that night. All three of the other biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell how Peter went out and wept after he remembered how Jesus prophesied that he would deny him that night.

John omitted many of the details that the other biographies included. John's biography of Jesus is considerably different (although never contradictory) from the other three. What John did report gives us more knowledge about the life and teachings of Christ than if we only had the other three, because he told many things they did not.

Accused before Pilate

- **They lead Jesus therefore from Caiaphas to the Praetorium. And it was early, and they did not enter into the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.**
- **Pilate therefore went out to them, and said, What accusation do ye bring against this man? They answered and said to him, If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to thee. Pilate therefore said to them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said to him, It is not permitted for us to kill any man, so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled that he spoke, signifying what kind of death he was going to die (John 18:28-32).**

A Praetorium was the headquarters of a high ranking Roman official, who in this case was Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. The Jews brought Jesus there because his permission was required to crucify Jesus.

The idea that the Jews would have been defiled if they entered the Praetorium was something they invented for themselves. For the law of Moses says no such thing. The idea of being defiled that way was a result of their contempt for the Gentiles, who in their eyes were like the Hindu untouchables.

Notice the bitterness in the answer the Jews gave to Pilate when he asked their accusation against Jesus: **"If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to thee."** Their response was a veiled rebuke against the need to come to him. Pilate no doubt wanted to get rid of them, which is why his retort was, **"Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."** The Jews then told Pilate they wanted to kill Jesus, and they

needed his permission. They especially resented that requirement because they wanted the power to kill anyone. Therefore, they had to come to Pilate to get his permission.

Their response proved what Jesus had prophesied would happen to him. For he had said to his disciples, **“The Son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up. And they were exceedingly sorry”** (Matthew 17:22-23).

The approach of the high priest and the elders of the Jews to the Roman ruler was very different many years later when they wanted to kill the apostle Paul. That record is told in the book of Acts: **“And after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders, and a certain orator, Tertullus, who appeared to the governor against Paul. And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Experiencing much peace because of thee, and worthy deeds happening to this nation because of thy foresight, we welcome, both always and everywhere, eminent Felix, with all thankfulness.**

“But, that I may not detain thee on more, I entreat thee in thy clemency to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, who even instigates sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple, whom also we took, from whom thou will be able, having examined him, to learn about all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews also agreed, claiming to have these things this way” (Acts 24:1-9).

Not long after the death of Christ a disciple of Christ named Stephen was killed without Roman approval. The chief priests and the elders approved of his killing, but they did it by a lynch mob.

That story is also told in Acts: **“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it.**

“Now when they heard these things, they were split with a saw in their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth against him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, having gazed into heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, Look, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But they, having cried out in a great voice, held their ears shut, and rushed upon him with one accord.

“And having expelled him out of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments beside the feet of a young man called Saul [later called Paul]. And they stoned Stephen, who was calling and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And having knelt down, he cried out in a great voice, Lord, place not this sin to them. And after saying this, he slept [meaning he died]” (Acts 7:51-60).

How the Romans responded to that killing is not told. They probably did nothing because it was a mob who killed Stephen, and not particular individuals they could identify.

His trial before Pilate

- **Pilate therefore again entered into the Praetorium, and called Jesus, and said to him, Are thou the king of the Jews? Jesus answered, Do thou say this of thyself, or did others tell thee about me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests delivered thee to me. What have thou done?**
- **Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my subordinates would have fought so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from here. Pilate therefore said to him, Then thou are a king?**
- **Jesus answered, Thou say that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth. Every man who is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate says to him, What is truth? And having said this, he went out again to the Jews, and says to them, I find not one cause in him (John 18:33-38).**

Notice how Jesus confessed he was king of the Jews, but his kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom on the earth is a spiritual kingdom within the hearts of his believers. Remember what he said when he was asked when the kingdom of God would come: **“The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! For behold, the kingdom of God is inside of you”**

Jesus said he came into the world so that he would testify to the truth. He also said that every man who is of the truth hears his voice. Also during his prayer at the last supper, Jesus said to the Father, **“Thy word is truth”** (John 17:17). Therefore, every man who accepts the word of God listens to what Jesus said. And since we have chosen to be of the truth we obey it.

Most sinners do not even believe in truth. When modern Americans turned from God and his Holy Bible they also turned away from belief in truth. Like Pilate, they are skeptics. Pilate did not even wait for Jesus to answer his question. Like unbelievers everywhere, he had made up his mind that there was no such thing as truth.

When Pilate said to the Jews that he found not one cause in him, that meant he found not one cause for guilt in him. And Jesus was indeed completely innocent. Those corrupt chief priests refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah. And since he claimed to be, then according to their reasoning he was condemned by the law to die. However, their reasoning was very flawed, because they would not accept the overwhelming evidence that God was with him, proving he was the Messiah.

Those Jews had already tried Jesus and found him guilty. However, that was not justification enough for Pilate. Therefore, those evil men were desperate to find some other reason to persuade Pilate. It was only by provoking the crowd that were they able to pressure Pilate to have it done.

The custom of releasing a prisoner

- **But there is a custom for you that I should release to you one man at the Passover (John 18:39).**

The law of Moses commanded the people to have three feasts annually, although the Jews have later added to that number. This particular feast, the Passover feast, was the first one commanded of them.

The Bible says nothing about the origin of the custom to release one prisoner during a feast. It was never part of the law of Moses. Indeed, it was actually against the justice promoted by the law. For there is nothing in the law of Moses about such pardons, although for some things a man could redeem himself with a ransom.

Here is one law about that: **“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death.**

If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him. Whether it has gored a son, or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him” (Exodus 21:28-31). Apparently in such cases, the family of the victim was allowed to impose a ransom on the guilty man in place of the death penalty.

However, for crimes like murder and manslaughter (traditionally defined) no ransom could be given: **“Moreover ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And ye shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest”** (Numbers 35:31-32).

Nevertheless, whether just or not the governor agreed to that custom, no doubt to help pacify the Jews during the times of those gathers, which were the most dangerous ones for riots to occur against the Roman occupation.

Choosing Jesus or a notorious prisoner

- **Do ye wish therefore I would release to you the king of the Jews? They all cried out again therefore, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. But Barabbas was a robber (John 18:39-40).**

There were other men who could have been released. But Pilate only gave the Jews the choice of Barabbas or Jesus. He may have thought that Barabbas was so deserving of punishment that the people would choose Jesus instead. He knew that Jesus was innocent and was only charged by the rulers of the Jews because they were envious of him (see Matthew 27:18). Pilate did have a sense of justice; he was not as ruthless as Herod.

The Roman soldiers mock and abuse Jesus

- **Therefore Pilate then took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers having woven a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and put around him a purple garment. And they said, Hail, king of the Jews! And they gave him slaps (John 19:1-3).**

We of the Western World, having been influenced for so long by the Christian way of life, consider the actions of those Roman soldiers to be cruel and barbaric. However, the fact is that most of the peoples of the world act that way. For example, every war we have fought in Asia resulted in the brutal treatment of our soldiers when they became prisoners, much worse treatment than what the Roman soldiers did to Jesus.

Putting a purple garment on Jesus, and a crown of thorns on his head were done to mock him because he said he was the king of the Jews. In their eyes that was such an absurd claim that he deserved being ridiculed that way. I also believe those men enjoyed abusing Jesus, because they had a barbaric spirit. The world contains many men who enjoy being cruel.

It took enormous willpower for Jesus to restrain himself and endure that abuse. Every other man in such a situation is helpless. However, Jesus could have stopped them in a moment, and he could have abused them even more severely. But Jesus quietly endured that suffering and humiliation for our sakes. He endured it because he loves us. All those things were necessary for him to be able to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

Remember how he prophesied those things would happen to him, saying to his apostles, **“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scholars. And they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles to ridicule, and to scourge, and to crucify. And the third day he will rise”** (Matthew 20:18-19).

Pilate finds no guilt in him

- **Therefore Pilate again went forth outside, and says to them, Behold, I bring him out to you, so that ye may know that I find not one cause in him. Jesus therefore came outside, wearing the thorny crown and the purple robe. And he says to them, Look at the man! (John 19:4-5).**

Pilate definitely wanted to release Jesus, but he did not want to cause a riot by so doing. I believe the reason Pilate had Jesus scourged was to pacify the crowd. And the treatment of the soldiers plus all the other abuse and sleep deprivation that Jesus had suffered no doubt made his body extremely weak and pathetic looking.

The condition of his body, plus wearing the thorny crown and purple robe, must have made him look ludicrous claiming to be a king. I believe Pilate was hoping the way he looked would arouse enough sympathy from the crowd that they would not protest about his release. It would also show them how completely harmless Jesus was. Thus, he brought him out and said to them, **“Look at the man!”**

The rulers demanded crucifixion

- **When therefore the chief priests and the subordinates saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify, crucify him! Pilate says to them, Ye take him and crucify, for I find no cause in him (John 19:6).**

The chief priests and their subordinates were the real instigators of the crowd, and they wanted no sympathy for him. Pilate seemed so disgusted with them that he demanded they crucify him. And he told them for the third time that he found no cause for crucifying him.

The Jews claimed he deserved to die

- **The Jews answered him, We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die because he made himself the Son of God.**
- **When Pilate therefore heard this word, he was more afraid. And he went into the Praetorium again, and says to Jesus, Where are thou from? But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore says to him, Thou do not speak to me? Know thou not that I have authority to crucify thee, and I have authority to release thee?**
- **Jesus answered him, Thou would have no authority against me, unless it were given thee from above. Because of this he who delivered me to thee has greater sin (John 19:7-11).**

The Jews believed they were completely justified in having Jesus killed because he claimed to be the Son of God. They absolutely refused to accept the overwhelming evidence he gave them. Their hearts were totally hardened against him, and no amount of evidence would persuade them otherwise. He was completely different from what they expected in their Messiah. Plus Jesus refused to cooperate with them, and he even rebuked them for their hypocrisy. Therefore, they hated him.

The peoples of the ancient world believed in polytheism, and no doubt Pilate also believed. Therefore, when he heard them say that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he became more afraid. The ancient world had created many myths about how their gods interacted with them. And Pilate probably thought that Jesus was the son of one of their gods. And since they believed their gods had great power, Pilate was probably afraid of offending one of them.

Therefore, Pilate asked Jesus where he was from. For according to their myths sometimes their gods and the offspring of them would come into the world as humans. And Pilate wanted to know if Jesus really was one of them. However, Jesus would not answer him.

Pilate reminded Jesus that he had the authority to either crucify or release him. Jesus then reminded Pilate that he would have no authority against him, unless it had been given him from above. Pilate had been given that authority directly by the Roman government. And he received it indirectly by God himself, because the prophet Daniel said, “... **the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will**” (Daniel 4:25).

The Jews indirectly threaten Pilate

- **From this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend. Every man who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.**
- **When Pilate therefore heard this word, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.**
- **Now it was the Preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he says to the Jews, Look at your king! But they cried out, Away, away, crucify him! Pilate says to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king except Caesar (John 19:12-15).**

Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but the chief priests provoked the crowd to demand he be crucified. Remember, Pilate even scourged Jesus to make him look even more harmless and pathetic. Nevertheless, the chief priests warned Pilate, when they said to him, **"If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend. Every man who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."**

That was a veiled threat to Pilate himself, a serious threat. For Pilate could himself have been prosecuted by the Roman government if Jesus later caused trouble for them. The chief priests even said to him, **"We have no king except Caesar."** Like all disciples of the devil, they lied because they hated the Romans and the occupation of their country. Those evil men would have said anything to get their way. They acted exactly like the devil himself. Therefore, Pilate finally consented to have him crucified.

Pilate brought Jesus out to the judgment seat at the place called The Pavement because the Jews did not want to be defiled (in their eyes) by going into the Praetorium. The day of Preparation was Friday because the law of Moses forbade food preparation on the sabbath. Their sixth hour was noon by our time.

Jesus is led away to be crucified

- **Therefore he then delivered him to them, so that he might be crucified, and they took and led Jesus away. And he went out bearing his cross to a place called, of a Skull, a place that is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him, and two others with him, on this side and that, and Jesus in the middle (John 19:16-18).**

That passage says Jesus went out bearing his cross. However, Matthew tells how Jesus was unable to bear his cross the whole way to Golgotha. Instead, the soldiers drafted another man to carry his cross for him (see Matthew 27:32).

That passage in Luke also says that Jesus was crucified between two other men. However, there is evidence in the biography of Jesus by Luke that there were other men being crucified besides them (see Luke 23:39-43).

The title on his cross

- **And Pilate also wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And it was written, JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Therefore many of the Jews read this title, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Greek, in Latin (John 19:19-21).**

The sign placed on the cross of Jesus is recorded somewhat differently in the four biographies of him. In Matthew the inscription says, **“THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Matthew 27:37). In Mark it says, **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Mark 15:26). In Luke it says, **“THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Luke 23:38). And in John it says, **“JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (John 19:19).

Notice how they all differ in some way. What the complete inscription no doubt said, was “This is Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews.” Each of the biographers simply omitted part of the inscription. However, all four of them included the words **“The King of the Jews.”** That was the most important part of the inscription. The things each of them omitted were incidental parts, such as the fact he was a Nazarene or that his name was Jesus. The great fact was that he is truly the King of the Jews. Indeed, the Bible says he is **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14).

Remember, it is often necessary to read other passages in order to obtain more complete or detailed knowledge about things in the Bible. Never expect a passage about something in the Bible to always be complete about the subject.

For that reason beware of false teachers, because they commonly quote one or two passages to justify what they say, when further reading shows their conclusions to be false. Study the Bible for yourself, because you are going to be judged by what you do.

The chief priests protested

- **Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, The king of the Jews, but, That man said I am king of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written (John 19:22).**

The rulers of the Jews had great contempt for Pilate, and he had great contempt for them. The Jews deeply resented having to come to him for permission to kill Jesus. And they had to forced him (with their threats) to crucify him.

Nevertheless, Pilate was still able to get some revenge by writing that title above the cross of Jesus. It greatly irritated the chief priests, because that title publicly proclaimed Jesus was the king of the Jews. Thus are the ways of the world, which, unlike the kingdom of God, is filled with much mutual hostility.

Dividing his garments

- **The soldiers therefore when they crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. But the tunic was a seamless weave, from the top throughout.**
- **They said therefore among themselves, Let us not divide it, but cast a lot for it, whose it will be, so that the scripture might be fulfilled, which says, They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast a lot. Therefore the soldiers indeed did these things (John 19:23-24).**

Crucifying him in the presence of his enemies, and dividing his garments and casting a lot, were all prophesied in this psalm: **“For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evil-doers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast a lot”** (Psalm 22:16-18). The fact they did those things with his garments while he was being crucified proves he was crucified naked.

John says they divided all of his garments except for his tunic. His tunic was a seamless weave, which is why they did not want to divide it, but instead they cast a lot for it. Remember, those were the days when there were no machines; everything was handmade. Therefore, a tunic of a seamless weave was more valuable.

Women near his cross

- **And his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene had stood near the cross of Jesus (John 19:25).**

According to that passage, Mary the mother of Jesus had a sister who was also named Mary. That Mary was said to be the wife of Cleopas. Cleopas is only mentioned in one other place in the Bible. That was when John was describing how, after Jesus was resurrected, Jesus appeared to two of his disciples incognito (see Luke 24:18). Why the two sisters had the same name is not told. Therefore, there has been much conjecturing about that passage. Some claim Mary’s sister was unnamed, and there were four women there, not three. The issue is another one of those trivial things that are unimportant for us.

There were many other women who had great love for Jesus. They were probably not there because it was too painful for them to witness his suffering and death that way.

Caring for his mother

- **When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he says to his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then he says to the disciple, Behold, thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own place (John 19:26-27).**

In that passage the disciple whom Jesus loved was thought to be the apostle John. However, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was also called a disciple whom Jesus

loved (see John 11:3). Remember however, the chief priests sought to kill Lazarus (see John 12:10). Therefore, it is very improbable that Lazarus was there.

That passage is another example that reveals the superior character of Jesus. For even during his great agony on the cross he thought of the welfare of those he loved. Therefore, he commanded John to care for his (Jesus') mother. And when we follow in Jesus' steps then we too must be unselfish, and think of the welfare of those we love, even when we are suffering.

Jesus dies

- **After this, Jesus, having seen that all things are now completed, so that the scripture might be fully complete, says, I thirst. Therefore a vessel full of vinegar was set there. And having filled a sponge with the vinegar, and having put it around a hyssop, they brought it to his mouth. When therefore Jesus received the vinegar, he said, It is finished, and after bowing his head, he gave up the spirit (John 19:28-30).**

The scripture that was fulfilled that way was from the Psalms: **"They also gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"** (Psalm 69:21). Vinegar is sour wine. When the passage says he received the vinegar, that means he merely tasted what it was. For Jesus had earlier said to his apostles, **"But I say to you, that I will, no, not drink of this fruit of the grapevine henceforth until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"** (Matthew 26:29). Therefore, he did not drink it.

The man brought vinegar to Jesus because Jesus said **"I thirst."** However, why the man brought vinegar to drink is not clear. Perhaps the vinegar contained enough alcohol in it to provide some relief from the pain. If that is the case, then the man was being compassionate toward Jesus.

Jesus could say, **"It is finished,"** because he fulfilled every prophecy about him during his lifetime in the world (other prophecies about him were about things after his death). Moreover, he completed his life of perfect obedience to his Father in heaven, even to enduring the agony of his trial and crucifixion. Therefore, his life of trials and temptations here upon the earth was finished.

More prophecies are fulfilled

- **The Jews therefore, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the sabbath, since it was Preparation (for it was the high day of that sabbath), they besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and they might be removed. The soldiers therefore came, and indeed broke the legs of the first, and of the other man who was crucified with him.**
- **But having come to Jesus, when they saw him now having died, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and straightaway blood and water came out.**

- **And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true. And that man knows that he speaks true, so that ye may believe. For these things happened so that the scripture might be fulfilled, Not a bone of him will be broken. And again another scripture says, They will look toward whom they pierced (John 19:31-37).**

The Preparation was Friday, the day before the sabbath. It was called the Preparation in the New Testament probably because the law forbade preparing food on the sabbath. Passover that year occurred on Thursday, the day before Jesus was crucified. The day of Passover began the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted seven days. Remember however, the entire feast of unleavened bread was also called Passover: As Luke said, **“Now the feast of unleavened bread was coming near, which is called Passover”** (Luke 22:1).

This particular sabbath was a special one because it was also part of the feast of unleavened bread. That is probably why that particular day was called the high day. See my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ* for more details about the sabbath and the Passover feast.

One of the laws of Moses says, **“And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shall surely bury him the same day, for he who is hanged is accursed of God, that thou not defile thy land which Jehovah thy God gives thee for an inheritance”** (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). That is why the Jews wanted the men who were crucified to die before the end of the day.

I am told that breaking the legs of a man being crucified hastens his death because it restricts his breathing and he soon dies by suffocation. No doubt Jesus had died sooner than normal because his body had been so badly abused even before he was crucified. He did not have a superhuman body.

Regarding the law of the Passover feast, Jehovah said to Moses, **“Speak ye to all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household be too little for a lamb, then he and his neighbor next to his house shall take one according to the number of the souls, according to every man’s eating ye shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. Ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats. And ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening.**

“And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel upon the houses in which they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread, with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat of it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire, its head with its legs and with the inwards of it. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning, but that which remains of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

“And thus ye shall eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And ye shall eat it in haste. It is Jehovah’s Passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of

Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am Jehovah. And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to Jehovah; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever” (Exodus 12:3-14).

The Passover feast required eating the flesh of a male lamb that was a year old and without blemish. Remember, Paul said that Jesus was our Passover. Jesus was called the Lamb of God (see John 1:29), and he was indeed without blemish (see First Corinthians 5:7).

The law about not breaking any bone of the Passover lamb is this one: **“And Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the Passover. There shall no foreigner eat of it, but every man’s servant who is bought for money, when thou have circumcised him, then he shall eat of it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat of it. In one house it shall be eaten. Thou shall not carry forth any of the flesh abroad out of the house, neither shall ye break a bone of it. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it”** (Exodus 12:43-47).

The prophecy about not a bone of him being broken is probably this one: **“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but Jehovah delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones. Not one of them is broken”** (Psalm 34:19-20).

The scripture about being pierced is from the prophet Zechariah: **“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication. And they shall look to me whom they have pierced. And they shall mourn for him, as a man mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as a man who is in bitterness for his firstborn”** (Zechariah 12:10).

Jesus is buried

- **And after these things Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because of fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might remove the body of Jesus, and Pilate allowed him. Therefore he came and removed the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus also came (he who at the first came to Jesus by night) bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.**
- **So they took the body of Jesus, and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, just as is the custom of the Jews to bury. Now a garden was in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden a new sepulcher in which no man was yet laid. Therefore because of the Jews’ Preparation (because the sepulcher was near) they laid Jesus there** (John 19:38-42).

Both Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus were secret disciples of Jesus (see Matthew 27:57 and John 3:1-2). They had concealed their faith in him because they were both men of influence, and they obviously did not want to lose it. Remember, the Pharisees had decreed that if any man confessed Jesus, he was to be excommunicated from the synagogue.

Nevertheless, those men mustered enough courage to give Jesus a decent burial. They could have justified it to the Pharisees by saying they wanted to show their respect for

him, even if they did not confess believing in him. Nevertheless, the Bible gives other information, except to say they were secret disciples.

The amount of the myrrh and aloes that Nicodemus brought seems excessive. However, I am told very large quantities of those things are sometimes used to prepare a body for burial, especially for men of renown.

Regarding his resurrection

There were many things that happened during the time of his resurrection. Each of the four biographies of Jesus give their own individual reports, all of which vary about some things. I put all of what they testified together in a summary, which I give a little farther in this commentary.

Mary discovers the empty sepulcher

- **Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene comes early, while it was still darkness, to the sepulcher, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher (John 20:1).**

The book of Mark says that Mary the mother of James, and also Salome, came to the sepulcher with Mary Magdalene (see Mark 16:1), but John only mentions Mary Magdalene. He probably only mentioned her because she was involved with more things about the resurrection than the other women.

Not mentioning the other two women is just another example of the abbreviated nature of the Bible record. Many unimportant details about events are omitted. Therefore, fret not about them, as scoffers want you to do. Also what John probably means is that Mary Magdalene began to go to the tomb while it was still darkness, very early on the first day of the week, but she arrived during the light of dawn.

Peter and John run to the sepulcher

- **Therefore she runs and comes to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and says to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him, Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the sepulcher.**
- **And the two men ran together, and the other disciple ran ahead quicker than Peter and came first to the sepulcher. And after stooping down, he sees the linen cloths lying, yet he entered not.**
- **Simon Peter therefore comes following him, and he entered into the sepulcher. And he sees the linen cloths lying, and the face cloth that was on his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but wrapped up in one place separately. Therefore then the other disciple who came first to the sepulcher, also entered in, and he saw and believed. For they had not yet**

known the scripture that he must rise from the dead. So the disciples departed again to themselves (John 20:2-10).

The other three biographers of Jesus omit reporting this event. What Peter and **“the other disciple whom Jesus loved”** (the apostle John) did is interesting, but not important for us to know. It is, however, added evidence of the zeal that both Peter and John had for Jesus. Peter’s zeal was more demonstrative, while John’s was more restrained.

The scripture that says Christ must rise from the dead is from the Psalms: **“For thou will not leave my soul to Sheol, nor will thou allow thy holy man to see corruption”** (Psalm 16:10). Both Peter and Paul quoted that scripture in sermons they gave after Jesus ascended into heaven and the church was established (see Acts 2:27, 31 and Acts 13:34-37).

The text says that when John enter in the sepulcher **“he saw and believed.”** That must mean he believed that Jesus had been resurrected. For when the text says they had not yet known that scripture, it probably means they had not yet understood that it applied to Jesus. For those men were very well versed in the words of the Bible.

Jesus appears to Mary

- **But Mary had stood outside near the sepulcher weeping. So, as she wept, she stooped down to the sepulcher. And she sees two agents in white, sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus was lain. And those men say to her, Woman, why weep thou?**
- **She says to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And having said these things, she turned backward, and sees Jesus standing. And she had not known that it is Jesus. Jesus says to her, Woman, why weep thou? Whom seek thou? That woman, supposing that he is the gardener, says to him, Sir, if thou have taken him, tell me where thou have laid him, and I will take him away.**
- **Jesus says to her, Mary. After turning around, that woman says to him, Rabboni, which says, Teacher. Jesus says to her, Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.**
- **Mary Magdalene comes informing the disciples that she has seen the Lord, and he spoke these things to her (John 20:11-18).**

After reporting to Peter and John how the body of Jesus was missing from the sepulcher, Mary had obviously followed them to the sepulcher. And when they departed she remained there, weeping. She did not realize the men in the sepulcher who asked why she was weeping were agents of God. Nor did she recognize Jesus when he asked her the same question. And so she gave them the same general reply. She wanted to know where the body of her Lord was. She had great love for Jesus, and was extremely devoted to him.

After hearing Jesus speak her name she recognized him. Although he told her not to touch him, it was not because there would have been any harm done. For he also appeared to the other women later, and they held his feet (see Matthew 28:9). Also, Jesus later said to the doubting Thomas, **“Bring thy finger here, and see my hands, and bring thy hand, and put into my side, and do not become faithless, but believing”** (John 20:27). Jesus probably told Mary Magdalene not to touch him so that she could go quickly and inform his brothers, meaning his apostles and the other disciples.

Notice how Jesus also told her he was going to ascend to his Father and their Father, and to his God and to their God. They needed to be informed quickly because Jesus was not going to remain in the world much longer. He was going back to heaven.

It is wonderful to think that the Father and God of Jesus is also our Father and God. And we too have a limited time to remain in the world before he takes us up to heaven to be with him. As James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14). We must use it wisely.

A summary of his resurrection

Putting together all four of the biographer’s reports of the resurrection of Jesus, I assembled this summary of what happened with him and his disciples at that glorious time. (I do not include what happened about the security detail that the rulers of the Jews sent to guard the tomb.)

A great earthquake occurred when an agent of the Lord descended from heaven. He rolled away the stone from the door and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning and his clothing white as snow. The security detail sent by the rulers of the Jews to watch over the sepulcher shook from fear of him, and they became as dead men, paralyzed with fright.

Late on the sabbath day (just before dawn while it was still dark) the women began to go to the sepulcher, bringing the spices they had prepared. (Remember, the days began and ended at 6 AM, not midnight as ours do.) On the way they wondered who would roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher. Early on the first day of the week after dawn they arrived at the sepulcher. They found the stone rolled away from it. They entered in, but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John, and told them of the missing body. Peter and John ran to the sepulcher, entered in, and found it empty. When John saw it he believed (in the resurrection). Then they both returned, Peter wondering at that which happened.

Mary Magdalene followed Peter and John when they ran to the sepulcher, but after they departed she remained, weeping. She stooped down to the sepulcher, and saw two agents, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus was lain. They asked her why she wept. She told them it was because they had taken away her Lord, and she did not know where they had laid him.

She then turned backward and saw Jesus standing, but did not recognize him. He asked her why she wept, and whom did she seek. She thought he was the gardener, and she said that if he had taken him, to tell her where he had laid him, and she would take him away. Jesus spoke her name. Mary turned around, and said to him, “Rabboni,” which says, Teacher. Jesus told her not to touch him, because he had not yet ascended to his Father. He then told

her to go to his brothers, and tell them that he ascends to his Father and their Father, and his God and their God.

In the meantime, the other women had apparently left Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher and began walking slowly away when they saw two men in shining apparel. They became frightened and bowed the face to the ground. The agents asked them why they sought the living among the dead. They told the women that he was not there, but was raised. And then reminded them how he spoke to them in Galilee, telling them that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day to rise. And the women remembered his sayings.

The agents then brought them to the place where the Lord lay. And after entering the sepulcher they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. He said to them, **“Be not alarmed. Ye seek Jesus, the man of Nazareth who was crucified. He was raised. He is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goes before you into Galilee. Ye will see him there, just as he said to you.”**

And having come out, they fled from the sepulcher, and trembling and astonishment seized them. They said nothing to any man, for they were afraid. But after coming out quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, they ran to notify his disciples.

And as they were going to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus also met them, saying, Hail. And having come, they held his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, **“Fear not. Go notify my brothers that they should depart into Galilee, and there they will see me.”**

In the meantime Mary Magdalene had gone to inform the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he spoke those things to her. Soon afterward the other women came, and reported those things to the eleven, and to all the others. However, their sayings appeared before them as idle talk, and they disbelieved them.

Also Jesus appeared to two of his disciples while they were on the way to a village not far from Jerusalem. But they did not recognize him until he had explained to them why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer the way he did. After which he became invisible to them. When they realized it had been Jesus they returned to Jerusalem and reported what they saw to the eleven apostles.

Jesus appears to his disciples

- **Therefore being evening that day, the first day of the week, and the doors having been shut where the disciples were who assembled because of fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace to you. And having said this, he showed them his hands and side. His disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord (John 20:19-20).**

It was not until evening (long after it became dark) that Jesus revealed himself to his apostles, here called his disciples. They had refused to accept the testimony of the witnesses who had seen him. Therefore, Jesus showed them his hands and his side. It was truly his body of flesh that was resurrected and appeared to them.

They finally believed and rejoiced when they saw him. During the last supper he had told them that would happen. He had said to them, **“And now therefore indeed ye have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no man takes your joy away from you”** (John 16:22). And after our lives on the earth are over, then our hearts will also rejoice when we see him in heaven.

He breathed the Holy Spirit into them

- **Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you. And after saying this, he breathed on them, and says to them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit** (John 20:21-22).

During the last supper Jesus said he would give them the Holy Spirit: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:15-17).

When Jesus breathed on them the Holy Spirit, that was the first time they received it. We receive the Holy Spirit when we believe in him and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. For Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended back to heaven, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). That gift is the Holy Spirit itself to dwell in us. For Paul said to the Corinthian brothers, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?”** (First Corinthians 6:19).

The apostles were later given special powers from the Holy Spirit at various other times after his ascension into heaven. One of the most spectacular of those times was when they received the power to speak in various other languages they had never learned. That happened on the day of Pentecost after Jesus was brought up to heaven. That was a miraculous sign for the Jews so they would listen to Peter’s sermon that opened the doors of the kingdom of God for them, which on the earth is the church (see Acts 2). Those special powers are no longer given because we now have the testimony of the New Testament.

Forgiving and retaining sins

- **If ye forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If ye retain of any, they are retained** (John 20:23).

The apostles were given the responsibility of proclaiming whose sins would be forgiven and whose would be retained. For they were his apostles (which word means being sent on a mission) to proclaim the word of God. Remember what he told them before he was crucified: **“Truly I say to you, however many things ye may bind on the earth will be things that are bound in heaven, and however many things ye may loose on the earth will be things that are loosed in heaven”** (Matthew 18:18). See that passage in Matthew for more of my comments about those things.

Thomas doubts Jesus was resurrected

- **But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I may see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will, no, not believe (John 20:24-25).**

The unwillingness of Thomas to even accept the testimony of the other apostles has earned for him the enduring epithet of doubting-Thomas. He is an example showing how the twelve men that Jesus chose to be his apostles varied widely in the character of their spirits. All but Judas were basically righteous men, but they differed in many other ways. And it will always be like that in any group.

Seeing versus believing

- **And after eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus comes, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace to you. Then he says to Thomas, Bring thy finger here, and see my hands, and bring thy hand, and put into my side, and do not become faithless, but believing.**
- **Thomas answered and said to him, My Lord and my God. Jesus says to him, Because thou have seen me, thou have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed (John 20:26-29).**

Jesus pronounced a blessing upon all who believe in him without having to experience for ourselves the miracle of his resurrection. For we who love truth and righteousness can easily believe in him because of all that his witnesses have testified. Which testimony is now found in the New Testament record. And anything said about him that is not recorded there is only conjecture. Moreover, anything said that contradicts what is said there must be rejected as false. For the Bible is the word of God, and the only word of God.

What is written is to give us faith

- **And indeed therefore many other signs Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, so that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).**

What John said there clearly indicates that the testimony we have in the New Testament is sufficient for us to believe in him. And it is through our faith in him that we have eternal life. However, our faith must be a living and working faith, bearing much fruit for righteousness, the kind of faith that energized and activated his loyal disciples back then to promote truth and righteousness, and it activates us now.

Some of the disciples go back to work

- **After these things Jesus manifested himself again to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias. And he revealed himself this way. There were together, Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other men of his disciples.**
- **Simon Peter says to them, I am going to harvest fish. They say to him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and straightaway entered into the boat. And in that night they caught nothing (John 21:1-3).**

Remember, Peter, James, and John had all been fishermen before Jesus called them. Thomas, Nathanael, and the two other men of his disciples may also have been fishermen, because they all went with Peter into the boat. They were in Galilee because the sea of Tiberias is also called the sea of Galilee.

They were in Galilee because Jesus commanded them to go there. For the agent at the sepulcher, after telling the women that Jesus had risen, said to them, **“And after going quickly, tell his disciples, He was raised from the dead, and lo, he goes before you into Galilee. There ye will see him. Behold, I have told you”** (Matthew 28:7). And as they went, Jesus met them and said, **“Fear not. Go notify my brothers that they should depart into Galilee, and there they will see me”** (Matthew 28:10).

Therefore, after having seen him in Jerusalem after his resurrection, they went to Galilee and were waiting for him there. And apparently, not having anything else to do, Peter decided he wanted to go back to work until Jesus appeared to them there. Faithful disciples of Jesus are industrious people, not wanting to waste time in idleness.

They had been idle there at Galilee because they did not know what the future held for them. They were not yet aware that they would be instrumental in establishing the kingdom of God upon the earth, the church of Christ. That process began on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven. The history of that is told in the book of Acts.

Jesus gives them a big catch of fish

- **But having now become morning, Jesus stood on the shore. However the disciples had not seen that it was Jesus. Therefore Jesus says to them, Children, have ye anything eatable? They answered him, No. And he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye will find. Therefore they cast, and they were no longer able to draw it for the magnitude of fishes (John 21:4-6).**

Remember at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, just before he called Peter, James, and John to follow him, Jesus gave them a big catch of fish after they had fished all night without success (see Luke 5:4-7). That was a mighty sign to those men that God was with Jesus. And now after his resurrection, he gives them another big catch of fish, which was more proof to them that Jesus was the resurrected Son of God.

John recognizes Jesus

- **That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved says to Peter, It is the Lord. So when Simon Peter heard that it is the Lord, he tied the coat around himself (for he was undressed), and threw himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in the skiff (for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits off), dragging the net of the fishes (John 21:7-8).**

John (who called himself the disciple Jesus loved) was the first to recognize the man on the shore as Jesus. I suspect the great magnitude of the fishes caused him to remember that happening when Jesus first called them to follow him. As usual, however, Peter was a man of action, and he threw himself into the sea to go to Jesus. When the passage says that Peter was undressed, that no doubt means he had nothing on except something to cover and protect his private parts.

Jesus prepared food for them

- **So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals set, and fish laying on it, and bread. Jesus says to them, Bring from the fishes that ye now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty-three (John 21:9-11).**

Those men had worked all night without success. And now they were working hard to bring in the great catch of fishes that Jesus gave them. They needed to eat, and Jesus provided for them. Our Lord is very compassionate to us, and he always provides for those who love him.

Peter showed his respect to Jesus by immediately coming to him. However, Jesus was also thinking about the other men, and so he told Peter to bring some of the fishes. That was a gentle way of telling Peter to go back and help the other men.

The net was not broken

- **And being so many, the net was not broken (John 21:11).**

Remember, the first time Jesus gave them a great catch of fishes (before they were his disciples) the net was tearing because of the multitude of them. Fish always struggle to escape when they are being caught. However, the description here in John says the net was not broken this time. Why the difference in the net tearing?

Those men could not help remembering the first time they had such a catch when Jesus told them to drop their net (into the water). That second large catch was no doubt to provide evidence that Jesus was the man on the beach who told them where to drop their net. They probably also remembered the net tearing the first time. Perhaps the reason the net did not tear this time is because they were his disciples. And it may have helped assure them that when they belong to him the means by which they catch men will never fail. And that means is the word of God.

The third appearance of Jesus to them

- **Jesus says to them, Come, eat breakfast. And none of the disciples dared to query him, Who are thou? knowing that it is the Lord. Jesus therefore comes, and takes the bread, and gives to them, and the fish likewise. This is now a third time Jesus was manifested to his disciples after being raised from the dead (John 21:12-14).**

After his resurrection Jesus appeared many times to many of his disciples, both men and women. This was the third time he manifested himself to those particular disciples. You can find on the internet compiled lists of those appearances that are recorded in the Bible. I will not create such a list in my commentary.

Therefore, because Jesus had already appeared to them after his resurrection they knew it was the Lord. The shock of his resurrection had already past, and they were more prepared for his appearance again to them.

Notice how Jesus served them with that morning meal. They had worked all night without catching anything. They were undoubtedly weary from their labor. And Jesus, being always compassionate to righteous souls who are weary, he prepared a meal for them. He had chosen those men, and he loved them. His act of kindness that way was an example of the principle of washing each other's feet.

If we love him feed his sheep

- **So when they ate breakfast, Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do thou love me more than these things? He says to him, Yea, Lord. Thou know that I love thee. He says to him, Feed my lambs.**
- **He says to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do thou love me? He says to him, Yea, Lord. Thou know that I love thee. He says to him, Feed my sheep.**
- **He says to him the third time, Simon, son of Jonah, do thou love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do thou love me? And he said to him, Lord, thou know all things. Thou know that I love thee. Jesus says to him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).**

Notice how Jesus did not speak that way to all of the apostles who were there. He only spoke to Peter; he did not even say those things to John. Regarding Peter's relationship with Jesus, remember what happened after Jesus asked his apostles who they said he was: **"And Simon Peter having answered, said, Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And I also say to thee, that thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.**

"And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever thou may bind on earth will be what is bound in the heavens, and whatever thou may loose on the earth will be what is loosed in the heavens" (Matthew 16:17-19).

It was upon the rock of that solid faith in him that Jesus would build his church. And he gave the keys of the kingdom of the heavens to Peter. That meant Peter would be the first to proclaim the opportunity to become a member of the kingdom. And the history in the book of Acts tells how Peter was indeed the first, both for the Jews and then later for the Gentiles (see Acts 2 and 10).

Jesus apparently also chose Peter to be the leader of the work of evangelizing the Jews (although Peter was nothing like the Catholic Pope). For Paul said, “... **he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles ...**” (Galatians 2:6-9). Jesus had chosen Paul to be the leader in the work of evangelizing the Gentiles. Nevertheless, neither of those men were given any kind of special church office, nor were they ever addressed by any kind of special title.

Regarding the matter of feeding the sheep of Jesus, that is something we must all strive for. If we love Jesus more than the material things of the world, then we too must feed his sheep. That means we must proclaim his good news of salvation to all who will listen. And we must teach all who will accept him. We must use whatever opportunities we have to spread his words of truth and righteousness.

Fathers and mothers must teach their children; all of us must teach our friends and neighbors (according to their willingness to listen, and as opportunities come); preachers and evangelists must proclaim him throughout the world. If we love Jesus we cannot put our light under a bushel. Remember what he said about that: “**Thus your light should shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in the heavens**” (Matthew 5:16). Of course, we must be prudent and use wisdom in all that we do, including when and how we feed his sheep.

The kind of death for Peter

- **Truly, truly, I say to thee, When thou were younger, thou girded thyself, and walked where thou would, but when thou become old, thou will stretch forth thy hands, and another will gird thee, and carry thee where thou do not want. Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he will glorify God. And after saying this, he says to him, Follow me** (John 21:18-19).

With those words Jesus indicated to Peter that he too would be crucified. John said Peter's death that way would glorify God. And it truly has by giving the world an example of how completely we must sacrifice ourselves for him. Various myths have been invented about the crucifixion of Peter, none of which can be verified. Therefore, reject them all. If God wanted us to know such things, he would have told us.

Near the end of his life Peter mentioned that prophecy about him in the second letter we have from him in the New Testament. Here is what he said: “**But I think it right, inasmuch as I am in this tent, to arouse you in memory. Knowing that the putting off of my tent is imminent, even as also our Lord Jesus Christ indicated to me. And also I will endeavor for you to always have, after my departure, the memory of these things to apply**” (Second Peter 1:13-15).

A rumor that John would not die

- **But Peter, having turned around, sees the disciple whom Jesus loves, following, who also leaned near his chest at the supper, and said, Lord, who is the man betraying thee? Having seen this man, Peter says to Jesus, Lord, and what of this man? Jesus says to him, If I want him to remain until I come, what is it to thee? Follow thou me.**
- **This saying therefore went forth among the brothers, that that disciple does not die. And yet Jesus did not say to him, that he does not die, but, If I want him to remain until I come, what is it to thee? This is the disciple who testifies about these things, and who wrote these things. And we know that his testimony is true (John 21:20-24).**

Notice how John accurately described what happened. For when the saying went forth that John would not die, John rebuffed that idea and quoted exactly what Jesus said, word for word. The men who wrote the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. And what they wrote was the truth and nothing but the truth.

The Bible is filled with truth and wisdom. Its words are impeccable. There is no other book that has ever been written that even comes close to its greatness. Nor will there ever be, because the Bible contains the word of God. Beware of scoffers and other disciples of the devil who attempt to discredit its words. They skillfully lie and falsify using cleverly devised myths.

Consider what Peter wrote about false teachers and fabricated words: **“For we revealed to you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, not men who followed in cunningly devised myths, but men who became eyewitnesses of the majesty of that man. For having received from God the Father honor and glory from a voice of such kind brought to him from the Majestic Glory, This is my Son, the beloved in whom I am well pleased. And we heard this voice, which was brought out of heaven, being with him on the holy mountain.**

“And we have the prophetic word sure, to which ye do well giving heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the daystar arises in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture comes to pass of a personal interpretation. For no prophecy was ever brought by a will of man, but holy men of God spoke, being led by the Holy Spirit.

“But false prophets also developed among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will sneak in pernicious denominations, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their wantonness, because of whom the way of the truth will be blasphemed. And they will exploit you in greed with fabricated words, whose judgment is not idle for long, and their destruction will not slumber” (Second Peter 1:16-2:3).

Test the teachings of the Bible in your own life and you will soon see how true its words are. I am a man who loves truth and righteousness. And I have sacrificed many things in my life to support those things, including my reputation among many. I am not a fool who

will believe a lie. I hate lies and deceit of any kind. I have studied the Bible intensely the great majority of my life, and it has never proven false to me.

Every day of my life I marvel about how much truth and wisdom are in it. And I can see its truths manifested everywhere I look. Consequently, there is an urge within me to proclaim its light to all who live in the darkness of this sinful world. Which darkness continually grieves me.

No room in the world for the books

- **And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly (John 21:25).**

Jesus lived an undistinguished life as a humble carpenter for the first thirty years of his life here on earth. And his ministry only lasted three years. Yet John said the world itself would not have room enough for the books that could be written about all that he did. That probably includes various commentaries and lessons from his teachings. The world will never have room for them all because what he said is so full of truth and wisdom. And the applications of what he taught are virtually without number. For they can be successfully applied to every generation and every situation

Although the biographies of him that we have in the New Testament are but a tiny sample of his life, nevertheless, they are sufficient for us to know him and believe in his good news of our salvation. Therefore, no man who can read the New Testament has any excuse before God not to believe in him.

A Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles

This book is a continuation of Luke's report about the good news of Jesus Christ. The first part was his biography of Jesus, including what Jesus taught. This part contains a history of the development of the early church, which was established by his apostles after Jesus ascension into heaven. And it includes what they taught of the good news of Christ.

Regarding use of the word Asia in the New Testament, it was a province in the western part of what we now call Asia Minor, and Ephesus was its capital. What is called Asia in modern times is what was formerly called the Far East or the latin word Orient.

Infallible proofs Jesus was resurrected

- **I indeed made the former treatise, O Theophilus, about all things that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until a day in which he was taken up, having commanded, through the Holy Spirit, the apostles whom he chose, to whom he also presented himself living, after his suffering, by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days, and speaking the things about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3).**

Notice how Luke said that Jesus presented himself to his apostles during a period of forty days after his resurrection, and he proved to them undeniably that he truly had been resurrected. Remember how doubtful they had been, not even believing those who testified they had seen him alive. The apostle Thomas even said, **"Unless I may see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will, no, not believe"** (John 20:25).

Jesus also spoke the things of the kingdom of God to them, which kingdom on the earth is the church. For it would be their responsibility both to establish the church and promote its growth. That was why he chose them from the beginning of his ministry to be with him and to learn from him.

Wait for the promise of the Father

- **And being assembled together, he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, Which, he said, ye heard from me. Because John indeed immersed in water, but ye will be immersed in the Holy Spirit after not many of these days (Acts 1:4-5).**

It was during the last supper when Jesus told them about **"the promise of the Father."** He said to them, **"But the helper, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you"** (John 14:26). And he also mentioned the prophecy, which John the immerser made at the beginning, about them being immersed by the Holy Spirit.

There are two general ways the disciples of Christ have been immersed by the Holy Spirit. The first way was when they received special powers from God, powers that were called gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, those special powers were no longer given after the New Testament was written. For they were only given to prove that the churches of Christ truly comprise the kingdom of God. The New Testament record is now the only proof that men need to believe.

The other way we receive the Holy Spirit is when we believe in Jesus and obey his command to be immersed in water for the remission of our sins. And that makes us begotten again as children of God. And as children of God his Holy Spirit resides within us. It resides within us in two ways. First, in the spirit of our conscience that helps motivate us to live righteously. For spirit means energy, and the energy of the Holy Spirit helps us live as God would have us.

Second, the Holy Spirit resides in us by the knowledge we have of the will of God for us, which is recorded in the New Testament. For remember, the Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of truth. Jesus spoke of that during the last supper, when he said, **“But when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, that will testify about me”** (John 15:26). And the words of the New Testament indeed testify about Jesus.

I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for eternity*.

Restoring the kingdom of Israel

- **Indeed therefore having come together, they questioned him, saying, Lord, do thou restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?** (Acts 1:6).

The question those disciples asked him reveals how little they understood about the true nature of the kingdom of God. They were still thinking of it as being limited to Israel and its people. It was natural for them to think of it that way because that was the way it had been from the time of Moses. Israel was God’s chosen nation.

For when Moses first brought the people of Israel out of Egypt to mount Sinai, Jehovah said to him, **“Thus thou shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself.**

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be my own possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:3-6).

And since Israel was then in bondage to the Roman empire, those men were anxious for the Lord to restore the kingdom of Israel and give them their independence.

Not for us to know

- **And he said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father established in his own authority** (Acts 1:7).

As he had often done, Jesus gave them a general principle instead of answering their question in the narrow sense they had asked him. The principle was that it is not for us to know specifically when future things were going to happen.

Receiving power to be witnesses

- **But ye will receive the power of the Holy Spirit that comes upon you. And ye will be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as of the extremity of the earth (Acts 1:8).**

The power of the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them, and that power would enable them to become effective witnesses to Jesus Christ, not only for the Jews, but also for the Samaritans and for the Gentiles—witnesses to him for the whole world. They needed that power because Jesus was going to use them to establish his kingdom upon the earth, the Church. And he was going to use them to complete the word of God for man by writing the New Testament scriptures.

I have no doubt those humble men did not realize at the time what he was going to accomplish by them. After Abraham had almost sacrificed his long awaited son on the altar in obedience to God's command, Jehovah said to him, **"By myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because thou have done this thing, and have not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou have obeyed my voice"** (Genesis 22:16-18).

I have no doubt Abraham did not comprehend the enormity of what God was going to do through his descendants. And when Jehovah first called Moses I have no doubt Moses had any idea of the enormity of what God was going to accomplish by him. Neither did Jesus' apostles comprehend the enormity of what Jesus was going to accomplish by them. And we too cannot comprehend what God can accomplish through us when we fully trust and obey him. We can only imagine by looking back in the past at the righteous men whose lives were recorded in God's holy book, the Bible.

Jesus ascends into heaven

- **And having said these things, as they were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him from their eyes. And while they were gazing at his going into the sky, behold, two men had also stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men, Galileans, why stand ye gazing into the sky? This Jesus who was taken up from you into the sky will so come, in that same way as ye saw him going into the sky (Acts 1:9-11).**

The Bible only tells about three men who were taken up to heaven while they were still alive. The first was Enoch, about whom the author of Hebrews said, **"By faith Enoch was transferred to not see death, and he was not found, because God transferred him. For before his removal he was reported to be pleasing to God"** (Hebrews 11:5).

The second man was the prophet Elijah. Jehovah had told Elijah to appoint Elisha to take his place as a prophet. Then after traveling a while they crossed the Jordan river and God took Elijah up into heaven, which happened this way: **“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which divided them both apart. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”** (Second Kings 2:11).

Jesus was the last man taken up into heaven while he was alive. Jesus had already died, but he resurrected himself back to life again. Remember how he told the Jews about that: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). Jesus was the only man with that power, because he was the only begotten Son of God who lived a sinless life. He received that power from God the Father.

And Jesus will raise us up to heaven one day if we remain faithful to him. For he also said to the Jews, **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and he who comes to me I will, no, not cast out. Because I have come down from heaven, not so that I might do my will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all that he has given me I would not lose from it, but I will raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me, that every man who sees the Son, and believes in him, may have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:37-40). Jesus will raise up the eternal spirit of every man who believes in him.

Those two men in white apparel were obviously agents from heaven. Their apparel made them more noticeable because pure white apparel was either unknown or exceedingly rare in those ancient times. Those heavenly agents told them Jesus would return the way they saw him going into the sky.

Paul spoke of that when he told of our resurrection: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words”** (First Thessalonians 4:15-18).

Jesus was quietly taken up into heaven in the sight of only a relatively few of his faithful disciples. However, when he returns that way, it will be with great power in the sight of the whole world. For when he spoke of the end of the world, he said to his disciples, **“For just as the lightning, its flashing from under the sky to under the sky, illuminates, so will the Son of man be in his day”** (Luke 17:24).

Lodging together in Jerusalem

- **Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem having a sabbath day journey. And when they came in, they went up into the upper floor where they were lodging, including, Peter and James and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son**

of James. All these men were continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, with women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:12-14).

Those were the eleven apostles plus other men and women from the most faithful of the disciples. They were obeying Jesus' command to **"wait for the promise of the Father."** There was no doubt much anxious anticipation of how that would happen. Nevertheless, their faith remained strong, and they continued united together in prayer and supplication.

Making supplication is the part of prayer that expresses requests to God. We are not told what their supplications were. However, a little further in the book of Acts (see 4:23-31) we are given the text of a prayer they made after Peter and John were released from captivity. Peter and John had been arrested by the chief priests, who rebuked them, beat them, and then released them because they had no cause to hold them.

Peter begins to lead

- **And in those days, Peter, having stood up in the midst of the disciples (and there was a multitude of names at the same place, about a hundred twenty), he said, Men, brothers, it was necessary for this scripture to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold through the mouth of David about Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus, because he was numbered with us, and received a share of this ministry (Acts 1:15-17).**

Those hundred and twenty disciples were probably gathered in the temple area. The temple grounds were very large, and it was the main gathering place for the Jews in Jerusalem. Peter had not been the leader among them while they were with Jesus, because Jesus was their leader. However, with Jesus gone, Peter began to assume that role. Indeed, Jesus had specifically commanded Peter after his resurrection to feed his sheep, which included his disciples.

Nevertheless remember, leaders in the church are not like leaders of the world. For Jesus had said to his disciples, **"Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman. Just as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:25-28).

Peter had no authority over them. As their leader he was simply the man who helped guide them as they applied the teachings and commandments of Jesus our Savior. For Jesus will always be our Lord and head of the church. What to do about the apostolic office of Judas is an example of the leadership of Peter.

Peter reminded them of the scripture that prophesied Jesus would be betrayed. That scripture is from the Psalms: **"Yea, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9). Judas had been chosen to share in the ministry of the good news of Christ. He had been numbered among the select twelve that were personally chosen by Jesus. What more recognition could he have received? Yet he lifted up his heel against Jesus and betrayed him to his enemies.

Jesus knew what kind of man Judas was, which is why he had been chosen among his apostles. Judas had been chosen to fulfill the prophecy of his betrayal. Jesus did not force Judas to betray him. The decision to betray him was made by Judas, not by Jesus. Judas betrayed him because he corrupted his spirit, preferring the ways of the devil.

Actually, there were no doubt many evil men during those times who would have betrayed Jesus the same way, if they had been chosen instead. And the world still has many men just like Judas, having corrupted themselves into evil spirits. Whatever particular evils they do are simply determined by their circumstances and opportunities.

The manner of Judas' death

- **(Indeed therefore this man obtained a field from the reward of his unrighteousness, and having become headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling at Jerusalem, so as to call that field in their own dialect, Akeldama, that is, The field of blood.)** (Acts 1:18-19).

Here is how Matthew described the death of Judas: **“Then Judas, who betrayed him, after seeing that he was condemned, having repented, he brought back the thirty silver pieces to the chief priests and elders, saying, I sinned, having betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is it to us? See thou to it. And having cast down the silver pieces in the temple, he departed, and after going away, he hanged himself”** (Matthew 27:3-5).

However, the book of Acts says that Judas became **“headlong, he [then] burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.”** The best explanation for the difference is that Judas must have hanged himself near some precipice. Perhaps he put a rope around his neck, tied the end of it to something like a tree, then jumped off a precipice. And the force of his fall not only broke his neck, but broke the rope itself, causing him to fall on the rocks below. And that violent fall tore open his abdomen causing his bowels to gush out.

Remember what Matthew said about the field of blood: **“Then Judas, who betrayed him, after seeing that he was condemned, having repented, he brought back the thirty silver pieces to the chief priests and elders, saying, I sinned, having betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is it to us? See thou to it.**

“And having cast down the silver pieces in the temple, he departed, and after going away, he hanged himself. And after taking the silver pieces, the chief priests said, It is not permitted to put them into the treasury, since it is a price of blood. And having held consultation, they bought the potter's field with them for burial for foreigners. Therefore that field was called the field of blood, to this day” (Matthew 27:3-8).

Another apostle needed to replace Judas

- **For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation become desolate, and let no man be dwelling in it, and, Let another take his office. It is necessary therefore, of the men who accompanied us during all the time during which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, having begun**

from the immersion of John to the day that he was taken up from us, for one of these to become a witness with us of his resurrection (Acts 1:20-22).

Peter quoted two Psalms. The first Psalm that Peter quoted is this one: **“Let their habitation be desolate. Let none dwell in their tents”** (Psalm 69:25). Those apostles were mostly illiterate men without formal education, yet they knew much about the scriptures. They were knowledgeable men. Moreover, they had more wisdom than the scholars, those educated men who joined in persecuting Christ. Those scholars had knowledge but not understanding. Like many things, knowledge is necessary but not sufficient to be wise.

The second Psalm that Peter quoted is this one: **“Let his days be few, and let another take his office”** (Psalm 109:8). Therefore, based upon that second psalm, Peter told them they must find a replacement to fill the place as an apostle that Judas had been given. And the choices they had were from the men who had been with Jesus throughout the time of his ministry, which began from the immersion of John to the day of his ascension into heaven.

The replacement would become a witness with them of his resurrection. Although they were not the only witnesses for Jesus, they were the select group of men Jesus chose to serve as his official witnesses and evangelists. He chose twelve men from his disciples to be his apostles. And the replacement for Judas would complete that number. Notice there was nothing said about forgiveness for Judas, which is what this evil generation would have demanded.

Matthias was chosen by lot

- **And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And having prayed, they said, Thou, Lord, knowing the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas transgressed to go to his own place. And they gave their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles** (Acts 1:23-26).

There were no doubt more than two men who would have qualified to replace Judas as an apostle. Apparently however, those were the two most outstanding among them. Therefore, they were put forward. Notice how the passages says *they* put forward two. Peter did not make that decision. They made the choice of those two men, but then asked God to make the final choice. Peter only initiated the process.

The first record in the Old Testament about casting a lot for a choice is from the law of Moses. It was to determine which of two goats was to be the scapegoat. The law says, **“And Aaron shall present the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and set them before Jehovah at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for the scapegoat”** (Leviticus 16:6-8).

God ultimately determines the outcome of every event, even those that are evil (meaning harmful). He either determines them according to his will, or he allows them to happen.

Indeed one of the proverbs of Solomon says, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah”** (Proverbs 16:33).

The Urim and the Thummim were devices introduced when Moses established the high priesthood. They were to be used by the high priest whenever he inquired of God. What they were exactly is not known. Nevertheless, they were used like the casting of lots to decide things. Peter could not use those because he was not a priest.

Although Matthias was chosen to replace Judas as one of the twelve apostles, he is not mentioned anywhere else in the scriptures. Nevertheless, he was apparently active with them in the work of establishing and developing the church. Actually, most of the apostles are not mentioned in the book of Acts.

The day of Pentecost

- **And while fulfilling the day of Pentecost, they were all together at the same place** (Acts 2:1).

The day of Pentecost was the time of the feast of weeks. In the New Testament the feast of weeks was called the day of Pentecost (Greek for fiftieth). For in the law of Moses the Israelites were commanded to number seven sabbaths (seven weeks which is forty-nine days) after bringing their sheaf of the first-fruits. And on that fiftieth day they were to celebrate the feast of weeks, which is also called the feast of harvest. There was no specific date set in the law for that feast. However, by the time of the New Testament that day had become fixed as the fiftieth day after Passover. Hence, the day of Pentecost (fiftieth).

The feast of weeks (or harvests) was one of the three annual feasts the Israelites were commanded to observe and celebrate. All three of the feasts were to be held in Jerusalem, and every Israelite man was to participate. The laws about their feasts is complicated. However, I describe and explain them in detail in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Tongues as of fire settle upon them

- **And suddenly there developed a sound from the sky as of a forceful wind moving, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them dividing tongues, as of fire, and they settled upon each one of them. And they were all filled of the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them to declare** (Acts 2:2-4).

What happened was a powerful manifestation of the effects of the Holy Spirit upon them. They both heard and saw its power. The sound was like a forceful wind moving. And as we have all learned, a strong wind can be very loud. The dividing tongues as of fire is very mysterious. Those things were a visible sign of the power they had received to speak in other tongues, meaning in other languages. They were given supernatural power to speak foreign languages they had never learned.

How those dividing tongues as of fire looked is not known. The flames of a fire have a resemblance to the shape of tongues. The best thing I can imagine is that they were like

balls of fire with flames that rose up, continually dividing apart as they waved in the air. Those balls of fire engulfed them and were slowly absorbed into their bodies. After which they had the power to speak in tongues.

Those dividing tongues as of fire were a visible sign of a spiritual force send from heaven giving those men that supernatural power. Of course, that is only my conjecture about how those things may have appeared. For the Bible record does not describe them beyond saying the were dividing tongues as of fire.

That event is probably what John the immerser meant when he said these words: **“I indeed immerse you in water, but a man mightier than I comes, of whom I am not worthy to unloose the strap of his shoes. He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and fire ...”** (Luke 3:16).

Men from many foreign countries saw it

- **Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And the sound of this that happened brought the multitude together. And it was bewildered because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and marveled, saying to each other, Behold, are not all these men who speak Galileans? And how do we each hear our own language in which we were born?**
- **Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and those dwelling in Mesopotamia, and Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, and Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya along Cyrene, and those Roman aliens, including Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians. We hear them speaking in our tongues the great things of God** (Acts 2:5-11).

Since that was the time of one of their annual feasts, Jerusalem was crowded with many visitors, both Jews and proselytes. And those visitors came from many different nations, because many of the Israelites had migrated to other countries. There were no doubt many different reasons why they had migrated, one of which was because the remnant of survivors of the former conquests had been forcibly scattered abroad after being conquered, first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians.

Obviously the disciples had all gone out from the house and were in the temple area being filled with the Holy Spirit. And while outside their ability to speak in tongues is what attracted the multitude. There were people from many different countries with many different languages. Whenever the disciples spoke **“the great things of God,”** the people in the multitude heard them speaking in their own native language.

Below is a list of those places:

- Parthians
- Medes
- Elamites
- Those dwelling in
 - Mesopotamia
 - and Judea

and Cappadocia,
 Pontus
 Asia
 Phrygia
 Pamphylia
 Egypt
 The parts of Libya along Cyrene
 Those Roman aliens, including Jews and proselytes
 Cretes
 Arabians

The geography of those different places and peoples ranged from what is now modern Iran on the east, to north Africa on the south, and to Rome on the northwest. They all heard the “great things of God” in their native language. And that included the language of Judea, which was either Aramaic or Hebrew or perhaps both.

The people were divided about it

- **And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, others saying to others, Whatever does this intend to be? But others, mocking said, They are filled of new wine (Acts 2:12-13).**

As almost everywhere there were scoffers among them. And they dismissed that miraculous power as the effects of drunkenness. That was as illogical as many of the conclusions made by modern scoffers (including the intellectual critics) about things reported in the Bible. Those ancient scoffers could not experience hearing the disciples speaking in other languages, because they heard them in their own native tongue. They could only learn what was happening from the testimony of those foreign visitors who were also hearing them in their own native tongue. Therefore, like all scoffers everywhere, they rejected the testimony of those who were experiencing that miracle, and considered it too fantastic.

What is meant by new wine is not clear. There have been many theories. New wine may have been a kind of beverage with a higher alcoholic content. It may have been something like brandy, which is distilled wine having a concentration of alcohol that is more than three times that of wine. Whatever was that kind of wine (or alcoholic beverage) it was associated with drunkenness.

Peter preaches to them

- **But Peter having stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and spoke out to them, saying, Jewish men, and all who dwell at Jerusalem, be this known to you, and listen to my sayings. For these men are not drunken, as ye suppose, for it is the third hour of the day.**
- **But this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel: And it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out from my Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your elders will dream dreams. And also on my bondmen and**

on my bondmaids in those days I will pour out from my Spirit, and they will prophesy.

- **And I will give wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and wonderful day of the Lord comes. And it will be, that every man, whoever may call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:14-21).**

Peter denied the false accusation that they were all drunk. And he used the fact it was only the third hour of the day. Remember, that was 9 AM according to our time, which means it was much too early in the day for men to be drunk. Even in modern times drunkenness is associated with lateness in the day. Although that was not proof they were not drunk, it did give them evidence to doubt that slander, which was apparently enough for Peter to get their attention.

Here is the Old Testament passage that Peter quoted: **“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions. And also I will pour out my Spirit upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days.**

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and wonderful day of Jehovah comes. And it shall come to pass, that whoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be saved” (Joel 2:28-32).

There are a few minor and insignificant word differences in the two passages. Remember, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Greek. And there are always going to be such minor kinds of differences when translating from different languages.

The first part of Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled on that day of Pentecost. His reference to the last days simply referred to a later time than when his prophecy was given. The second part of Joel’s prophecy was obviously about the end of the world and the final judgment. Jesus had described those things much more clearly to his disciples (see Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21).

Notice how the passage says that both sons and daughters, bondmen and bondmaids would prophesy. And both men and women, both bond and free would have God’s Spirit poured upon them. The part about God pouring from his Spirit upon all flesh no doubt refers to the message of the good news of Christ, which has been spread throughout the world.

The part of the scripture from Joel about calling upon the name of the Lord (Jehovah) refers to believing and accepting Jesus Christ. Peter explains that salvation next.

Jesus was the Messiah

- **Men, Israelites, hear ye these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man shown by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, this man, having been designated (by the purpose and foreknowledge of God) a man delivered up, ye, having taken by lawless hands, killed, having crucified, whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**
- **For David speaks for him: I beheld the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand, so that I may not be moved. Because of this my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad. And moreover my flesh will also rest in hope. Because thou will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will thou give thy Holy man to see decay. Thou made known to me the paths of life. Thou will fill me of joy with thy countenance (Acts 2:22-28).**

Peter identified Jesus as the Nazarene because the name Jesus was a very common one in those days. Knowledge about Jesus the Nazarene and his mighty works was known by all the Jews. Remember, even Herod the king heard about Jesus, and wanted to see him. All the rulers knew about him and what he was doing. Many of them even saw some of his miracles of healing. Yet their hearts were hardened against believing him. Indeed, it had been God's plan for them to reject and crucify him.

God had hardened the hearts of those chief priests and rulers of the Jews that way because they had corrupted their spirits. They made themselves evil spirits but pretended to be righteous men. They were the lawless hands that killed him by crucifixion. They were not lawless by human standards, but they were certainly lawless by the standards of God. For they had murdered an innocent man by the hands of the Romans.

Nevertheless, God raised Jesus from the dead, **"because it was not possible for him to be held by it."** It was not possible because Jesus was a sinless man, the only one who ever lived without sin or who ever will. His sinless life proved his spiritual and moral superiority, and his worthiness to be **"King of kings and Lord of Lords"** (Revelation 7:14). In my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity* I explain more about why no man besides the Son of God will ever live without sin.

The words of David that Peter quoted are from a psalm of the Old Testament: **"I beheld Jehovah always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices. My flesh also shall dwell in hope. For thou will not leave my soul to Sheol, nor will thou allow thy Holy man to see corruption. Thou made known to me the path of life. Thou will fill me of joy with thy countenance"** (Psalm 16:8-11).

Peter continues his sermon with an explanation of how that psalm refers to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was resurrected from the dead

- **Men, brothers, being permitted to speak to you with openness about the patriarch David, that he both perished and was buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day.**
- **Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, to raise the Christ from the fruit of his loins according to flesh to sit upon his throne. Having foreseen this, he spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that his soul was not left behind in Hades, nor did his flesh see decay. This Jesus, God raised up, of which we are all witnesses (Acts 2:29-32).**

God made that promise to David after he expressed his desire to build a temple for him. David asked the prophet Nathan what he thought of the idea. Nathan said to him, **“Go, do all that is in thy heart, for Jehovah is with thee”** (Second Samuel 7:3). However, that same night the word of Jehovah came to Nathan, and he told him that David’s son would build the house (temple) for him. Then Jehovah spoke his promise to David about the Christ, saying, **“And thy house and thy kingdom shall be made sure forever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever”** (Second Samuel 7:16).

The eternal throne of David was established through his descendant Jesus Christ. The people of Israel had been anxiously awaiting the son of David who would fulfill that promise. And the mighty works of healing that Jesus did were evidence to the people that he was the promised Son of David. Remember this passage: **“Then a blind and mute man being demon possessed, was brought to him. And he healed him, so as for the blind and mute man both to speak and to see. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, Is this not the son of David?”** (Matthew 12:22-23).

Remember also what Matthew said about the time Jesus made his grand entrance into Jerusalem: **“And the multitudes who went ahead and those who followed, cried out, saying, Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”** (Matthew 21:9).

The record about God swearing with an oath to David is found in one of the psalms: **“Jehovah has sworn to David in truth. He will not turn from it: From the fruit of thy body I will set upon thy throne”** (Psalm 132:11).

Jesus is both Lord and Christ

- **Therefore, exalted by the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out this that ye now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33-36).**

In his sermon Peter first quoted Joel's prophecy that God would pour out from his Spirit to the world. And the ability of Jesus' disciples to speak in tongues was a sign of that outpouring. Then he reminded the people about the mighty works that Jesus had performed, but he was still rejected and crucified. Then he gave evidence from the scriptures that the Christ would indeed perish, but he would nevertheless be raised from the dead. Then he reminded the people of God's promise to David about the eternal kingdom, and that Jesus was the promised son of David.

Finally, he explained why they were seeing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was revealed by their speaking in tongues. And he explained the riddle that Jesus had given them about David and the Christ. Here is that riddle: **"What does it seem to you about the Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him, Of David. He says to them, How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet? If David therefore calls him Lord, how is he his son?"** (Matthew 22:42-45).

No man had been able to solve that riddle until Peter explained it in his sermon that day of Pentecost. Jesus was one of David's descendants, a son of David. However, Jesus was also the Christ, the Lord of lords. And that was why David called him Lord.

They were convinced

- **Now having heard this, they were pierced in the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, Men, brothers, what will we do?** (Acts 2:37).

Those were among the most devout men of the Jews. And what Peter said convinced them. Those men were familiar with the teachings and the works of Jesus, as well as with the Old Testament scriptures. And the logical way that Peter explained how Jesus was the Christ, using the evidence they already knew about, was enough to persuade them to believe in Jesus.

Therefore, they were pierced in their hearts, because they realized the great sin they had committed in crucifying Jesus. And those devout men, having open minds and tender hearts, they were ready to accept what Peter and the other apostles told them to do.

When Peter said they had crucified the Christ, that does not mean those were the very men who were there during his trial demanding he be crucified. Some of them may have been, but all the Jews (the great majority of them) were guilty because they accepted the decision of their rulers and countenanced his crucifixion.

Repent and be immersed

- **And Peter said to them, Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:38).

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the salvation of our souls. And that happens when we are begotten again (and remain faithful until death). Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: **"Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water**

and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is begotten from the flesh is flesh, and that which is begotten from the Spirit is spirit.

“Marvel not that I said to thee, It is necessary for you to be begotten from above. The wind blows where it will, and thou hear the sound of it, but know not from where it comes, and where it goes. So is every man who is begotten from the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

Being begotten from water is the rite of immersion for the remission of sins. Simply being immersed in water is not sufficient. That rite of immersion must include repentance of sins, because the purpose of it is the remission of them. And that can only happen with repentance.

That rite of immersion is a physical act which is clearly visible to the witnesses of it. Being begotten from the Spirit is an act of the Spirit that is invisible. As Jesus said, it is like the wind that we can hear but cannot see. We cannot hear the force of the Spirit upon us, but it is manifested in our changed lives—lives that reject sin and live righteously in obedience to the commands of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul said that rite of immersion was like being buried and resurrected: **“Or are ye ignorant that as many as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into his death? We were buried therefore with him through the immersion into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life. For if we have become co-planted in the likeness of his death, then we will also be of the resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be inactivated, no longer to enslave us to sin”** (Romans 6:3-6).

Only those who believe and obey Jesus can receive the Holy Spirit. For Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:15-17). The helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit. And the world cannot receive it because they are unrepentant sinners.

There is much more to say and explain about the Holy Spirit and the gifts of it, which you can read in a chapter of my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I also explain there how God gives salvation to children who are too immature to believe.

God's promise of salvation

- **For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all those in afar, as many as the Lord our God may call** (Acts 2:39-40).

The promise of God was to bless them, and that blessing included all the nations. For when Abraham proved to Jehovah that he was willing to offer his only son on the altar of sacrifice in obedience to him, God said, **“By myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because thou have done this thing, and have not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess**

the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou have obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18).

Paul said that promised seed of Abraham was Jesus Christ. And it is through him that every man can have the hope of eternal salvation and be sons of God for eternity. What greater blessing could there be?

Peter said that the promise of God was for as many **“as the Lord our God may call.”** The call of God is more than just his invitation to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It also includes our receptiveness to that invitation, which he determines from examining the character of our spirits. Remember these words of Jesus: **“In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, and said, I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight”** (Luke 10:21).

God calls the childlike, because they are humble and open-minded. We make ourselves humble and open-minded, and that makes us receptive to his call. Therefore, those whom the Lord calls are determined both by God and by ourselves. We determine it by being childlike—humble and open-minded and eager to learn. And he determines it by opening our eyes to see and our ears to hear.

Remember these words of Jehovah that Jesus quoted to his disciples from the prophet Isaiah: **“By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear”** (Matthew 13:14-16).

Paul also spoke of the ability to see or not see when he said, **“Having therefore such a hope we use great boldness, and are not as Moses. He put a veil over his face in order for the sons of Israel not to gaze on the end of the fading. But their minds were hardened, for to this day the same veil remains at the reading of the old testament, not being uncovered, which thing is abolished in Christ. But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:12-16).

The reason for the veil over the face of Moses was because every time he had been in the presence of Jehovah he came back with his face shining. And that frightened them. For the record says, **“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone by reason of his speaking with him. And when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him”** (Exodus 34:29-30).

Be saved

- **And with many more other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Be saved from this crooked generation** (Acts 2:40).

The salvation that Peter urged upon them was the eternal salvation of their souls. Every generation is sinful because the world prefers the ways of the devil. However, some generations are more sinful than others. And that generation of Jews was a very sinful one, worthy of being called crooked. Living unrighteously is living crookedly. Crookedness is a result of sin and deceit. For example, being straightforward means being honest and truthful. Crookedness means being untrustworthy and unpredictable.

Wicked men love being crooked, because that makes it easier for them to prey upon others. They conceal their motives and goals, pretending to be harmless, honest, and helpful. But when the time is opportune they strike at their victims like a viper or attack them like a concealed leopard.

Three thousand souls were immersed

- **Indeed therefore those who received his word gladly, were immersed. And there were added in that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).**

Remember, at that time Jerusalem was filled with the most devout Jews, because in obedience to the law of Moses they came there for the feast of Pentecost. And the combination of witnessing the mighty wonder of the disciples speaking in tongues, and the powerful reasoning of Peter's sermon persuaded many of them to believe in Jesus. Consequently, three thousand of them were immersed for the remission of their sins and became members of the kingdom of God, the church.

Fellowship among the believers

- **And they were continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and the prayers (Acts 2:42).**

Much has been said about the meaning of the apostle's doctrine. First it must be understood that the apostles never created a doctrine of their own. Everything they taught was from the doctrine of Christ. The above passage is the only place the expression apostle's doctrine is found in the Bible. And it simply means the doctrine that the apostles were proclaiming, which was the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Saying that the disciples were continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine means they were united in accepting the authority of the apostles to proclaim the doctrine of Christ. No other men were recognized as authoritative about his doctrine.

That is one of the primary reasons for the great division among Christians today. Too many believers have allowed themselves to be led astray from the doctrine that the apostles proclaimed. And what the apostles proclaimed has been recorded in the New Testament. Therefore, the teachings of the New Testament is now our only authority for the doctrine of Christ. It is the continuation of the doctrine that the apostles proclaimed (the apostle's doctrine) from the beginning—the doctrine of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

There was great unity among the early Christians. And they spent time in fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. That means they spent time in various activities together, including meals and prayers. For the church is a brotherhood, a spiritual brotherhood with love toward each other. We are all spiritually related, being children of God.

Many wonders and signs

- **And fear developed in every soul. And many wonders and signs occurred through the apostles (Acts 2:43).**

When the passage says that fear developed in every soul, that must mean both believers and unbelievers. The people in Jerusalem were experiencing the birth of a powerful new movement. And since the apostles were performing many wonders and signs, the people must have been wondering about what it would all lead to. The unknown always creates some anxiety, and that may be one reason fear developed in them.

This most sinful generation of Americans has promoted the idea that we should have no fear of God. They love to quote the passage by John that says, **“Fear is not in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear holds punishment, and he who is afraid has not been fully perfected in love”** (First John 4:18). Yet how many can claim to have perfect love? Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God had perfect love because he was sinless. Therefore, he had no fear of God because he had no need for it.

On the other hand, because we have sinned we must have fear of God. Indeed, the Bible is filled with commands to fear God, commands from the law and the prophets of the Old Testament to the apostles of the New Testament. For examples, Moses commanded the Israelites, **“Thou shall fear Jehovah thy God, and him thou shall serve, and shall swear by his name”** (Deuteronomy 6:13). Solomon, at the end of his book Ecclesiastes, said, **“This is the end of the matter, all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether good or evil”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Peter said, **“Respect all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Respect the king”** (First Peter 2:17). And Paul said, **“Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in fear of God”** (Second Corinthians 7:1).

As long as we are spiritually imperfect we must fear God. Indeed, it is our fear of God that helps us avoid sinning against him. Just as our fear of high voltage power wires helps us avoid touching them. Just as our fear of speeding cars and trucks helps keep us from getting in their way. Just as our fear of poison helps keep us from putting it in our bodies. When we have no fear then temptations are harder to resist. That is further evidence of the great moral and spiritual superiority of Christ. He had no need to fear God, because he resisted every temptation.

All things in common

- **And all who believed were together, and had all things common. And they sold properties and possessions, and divided them to all, according as any man had need (Acts 2:44-45).**

That example of having all things in common is by no means evidence in support of communism. Remember, that was a special time when Jews from every nation had gathered for the feast of Pentecost. And apparently when the church was established many of those visitors chose to remain longer in Jerusalem than they had planned.

There was, therefore, a special need to help support them. For no doubt many were poor men who could not afford to support themselves beyond the time they had originally planned to return to their homes. Consequently, those among them who had extra resources and surplus funds were willing to help provide for that temporary support. They shared what they had for those who had need of it. However, unlike communism, that sharing and aid were completely voluntary and temporary.

Continuing with one accord

- **And continuing steadfastly, daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of nourishment in gladness and evenness of heart, praising God, and having favor with the whole populace** (Acts 2:46-47).

There was great unity among the disciples during those first days. They interacted together like a close-knit loving family. And that is what Jesus had prayed for—their oneness. For in his prayer, during the time of last supper with his apostles, Jesus said, **“And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me.**

“And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me” (John 17:20-23).

That kind of oneness and sharing can only work when they love each other and are completely committed to righteousness. When those things happen that kind of oneness can be very powerful for the achievement of good things.

Nevertheless, that oneness in the early church was not perfect. For even during the time of the apostles there were quarrels that needed correcting. Moreover, that strong unity has never been repeated. For not many years past by before serious divisions began to appear. Some of those divisions are mentioned in the books that are recorded in the New Testament. Some of those divisions were caused by ignorance, and some were caused by evil hearts.

Notice how the passage says that those first Christians had favor with the whole populace. They had favor with them because they were righteous souls. They were honest and considerate of others. They were righteous and helpful in whatever they did, because that is how Jesus wants us to be. Therefore, the populace no doubt felt very secure and happy about them. Who would not want to live with those kinds of neighbors?

Adding to the church

- **And the Lord was adding to the church daily those being saved** (Acts 2:47).

Remember, there were three thousand souls that responded to Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. And the church was growing so fast that new souls were being added daily. Notice how the passage says that it was the Lord who was adding to the church. No man

can add himself. God alone adds to his kingdom, because he alone knows our hearts. There will always be some unworthy souls who seek to be part of the church. And because they go through the motions they are accepted by the other members. However, God knows who are genuine.

Peter referred to new Christians as being like newborn babes, when he said, **“Therefore, having put off all evil and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, long for the genuine intellectual milk, so that ye may grow by it, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is excellent”** (First Peter 2:1-3). And we must all be careful that they are genuine newborn babes.

Hence, we must always be cautious about new converts, first determining whether they are genuine or not, because some are wolves in sheep’s clothing. And that determination is done by testing their spirits, as John said, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but examine the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (First John 4:1). There are not only many false prophets, there are also many false disciples. And only by examining their words and their deeds can we expose them.

I have personally been hurt when I was younger and naïve toward members of the church, assuming they were all genuine and worthy of trust. What has made things more difficult to trust each other is the lack of discipline in the congregations. They are following the evil trends of the world, tolerating sin and unrighteousness.

Healing a lame man

- **Now at the same time Peter and John were going up into the temple, at the hour of prayer, the ninth. And a certain man, being lame from his mother’s belly, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, called Beautiful, to ask charity from those who entered into the temple, who, having seen Peter and John intending to go into the temple, asked charity.**
- **And Peter, having gazed intently at him, with John, said, Look at us. And he gave attention to them expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, No silver and gold exists to me, but what I have, this I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk. And after taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up.**
- **And immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And leaping up, he stood and walked. And he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him, that this was the man who sat for charity at the Beautiful Gate of the temple.**
- **And they were filled of astonishment and amazement at that which happened to him. And as the lame man who was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, amazed (Acts 3:1-11).**

Remember, according to their timekeeping the ninth hour was what we call 3 PM. Following the steps of Jesus, Peter used the power that God had given him to (1) show compassion to that afflicted man, and (2) use that occasion to prove the authenticity of what he was preaching, that it was from God. For only the power of God can perform such miracles.

The healed man was so elated he could now walk, that he began walking around, leaping, and praising God. His legs were full of energy like those of a little child. And he praised God because he recognized that it was the power of God that healed him. How uncommon it has become in these spiritually degenerate times for people to praise God when they receive blessings, especially to praise him publicly. Most fail that way because of ignorance and lack of faith. The devil has misled them with the evil ideology of humanism, which has infiltrated and corrupted the hearts of even many believers. And it is destroying my country, as well as many other countries where faith in Christ had been strong.

Notice how the passage says that the healed man held Peter and John. He was so very grateful not only to God but also to Peter and John through whom he was healed. And his actions helped communicate to the people who it was that was responsible for that great miracle of God. And that helped make the people very receptive to what Peter was going to tell them. That simple act by the healed man was one way he was showing his gratitude. He was showing his worthiness to have received that great blessing.

They killed Christ but God raised him up

- **And Peter having seen, he responded to the people, Men, Israelites, why do ye marvel at this man? Or why do ye stare at us, as by our own power or piety we have made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Boy Jesus, whom ye actually delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate who preferred to release that man.**
- **But ye denied the Holy and Righteous, and asked for a man, a murderer to be granted to you. And ye killed the Pathfinder of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, this man whom ye see and know, his name has made strong. And faith through him has given him this complete soundness in the presence of you all (Acts 3:12-16).**

The first thing Peter did was to deny that it was by their own power the paralyzed man was healed. He gave credit to God, the God of their forefathers. And God performed that great miracle to glorify his beloved Son Jesus whom they had denied and killed. Peter testified that God had raised Jesus, the Pathfinder of life, from the dead. And it was by his name that the man was healed, made strong and whole. And it happened in their very presence. They had been privileged to witness that great miracle, the news of which no doubt spread quickly throughout the city and beyond. Think of how such a news report would spread throughout the world today.

Peter rebuked the people for having rejected and killed Jesus. He did not try to shift the blame to the Romans, as the scholars do today. The common reaction of a multitude that has been rebuked is either to depart or to fight back. However, this happened at the gate of the temple, where the most devout of the Jews gathered. Moreover, the powerful influence of that miracle of healing kept those devout Jews open minded and receptive. For they could not easily dismiss Peter, through whom that miracle occurred.

Incidentally, with reference to calling Jesus a boy, the Greek word is PAIDA (transliterated). And it literally means boy, girl, or child, depending upon the gender of the word, which in this case is masculine. The word can also mean servant, but Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. He served God but he was never a servant.

They did it from ignorance

- **And now, brothers, I know that ye did it from ignorance, as also your rulers. But this way God fulfilled what things were foretold, through the mouth of all his prophets, the Christ was to endure (Acts 3:17-18).**

Although Peter did not shift the blame for Jesus' death away from them, he did show them some understanding by telling them he knew they and their rulers did it from ignorance. They would not have rejected and killed him if they really knew that he was the Son of God. By not making the divinity of Jesus completely obvious and undeniable, God was able to fulfill the prophecies about the suffering the Christ was to endure. That was why Jesus on the cross said, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing"** (Luke 23:34). Jesus had to suffer those things in obedience to the Father in order to prove his absolute spiritual and moral superiority, thus earning the right to redeem our souls.

Repent and be converted

- **Repent ye therefore, and be converted in order to wipe away your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. And he may send Christ Jesus who has been pre-ordained for you, whom heaven must indeed receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through the mouth of all his holy prophets from the age (Acts 3:19-21).**

After explaining how that miracle occurred, and rebuking the people for having rejected and killed Jesus, Peter then began to speak of the good news of Christ. The good news of Christ begins with repentance. Indeed, when Jesus began his ministry the first thing he preached was repentance. For unless we repent of our sins it is impossible to ever enter the kingdom of God. Without repentance of sins nothing else matters.

The message of Christ is called good news for many reasons. Part of which involves having our sins wiped away. The times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord probably refers to our being begotten again into newness of life, a new spiritual life of holiness. Remember, the good news of Jesus Christ is fabulous, marvelous, and magnificent news. It is the very best news we could ever possible have. For it gives us the promise of eternal refreshing from God in his very presence in heaven.

Those things had been proclaimed at various times and in various words from God's prophets from the beginning. However, there were many things about those prophecies that were not easily understood. It was not until the life and teachings of Christ himself that they became more understandable.

For example, remember this fulfillment of prophecy about his grand entrance into Jerusalem: **"And Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat on it, as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, thy King comes, sitting on a donkey's colt. Now his disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these were things written because of him, and they did these things to him"** (John 12:14-16). It was not until Jesus had ascended into heaven that the disciples understood about that prophecy. That prophecy is recorded in Zachariah 9:9.

Jesus was prophesied

- **For Moses indeed said to the fathers, the Lord our God will raise up a prophet for you, from your brothers, like me. Ye shall hear him in all things, as many as he might speak to you. And every soul, whichever it will be, if it will not hear that prophet will be utterly destroyed from the people.**
- **And also all the prophets from Samuel and those in succession, as many as spoke, also proclaimed these days** (Acts 3:22-24).

Here is the Old Testament passage that Peter quoted: **"I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him"** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

Those words from the Old Testament were the words of Jehovah. However, Peter quoted Moses. Remember, Jehovah spoke to the people through Moses. Therefore, when Peter said Moses spoke, the words were those of Jehovah. Remember also, the Old Testament record is in the Hebrew language, while the New Testament record is in the Greek language. Therefore, the words you read are not going to be exactly the same because both quotations have been translated into English.

Notice also, that when Moses said that whoever would not hear that prophet (Jesus Christ) would be utterly destroyed from the people, while the Old Testament says that Jehovah would require it of him. Thus, the meaning of "require it of him" (in that context) clearly means being utterly destroyed from the people.

Samuel was the first man who was primarily a prophet. Many other men before him had prophesied, especially Moses. However, Moses was primarily the leader of the Israelites and their lawgiver. From the time of Samuel to Christ, God raised up other men who were primarily prophets, men such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. And each one of them had prophesied something about the coming of the good news of Christ. There are many good books available about those various prophesies.

They were sons of the covenant

- **Ye are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant that God made for our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in thy seed all the patriarchies of the earth will be blessed. To you first, having raised up his Boy Jesus, God sent him blessing you, in turning away each man from your evils (Acts 3:25-26).**

Peter was not speaking to men like me, a Gentile. He was speaking to the actual descendants of Abraham, the man who received that great promise of blessing from God. And it was to them that God sent his Boy Jesus, his only begotten Son, to fulfill that blessing. While Jesus was on the earth he was not sent to the Samaritans or the Gentiles, but only to the descendants of Abraham. Remember what he said to the Canaanite woman who pleaded for him to heal her daughter: **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24).

Nevertheless, Peter said that the promise of blessing spoken to Abraham included **“all the patriarchies of the earth,”** not just his descendants. It was after Jesus ascended back to heaven that Peter was later sent to open the gates of the kingdom of God to Gentiles (see Acts 10). And after that Jesus appeared to Paul to make him an apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, we Gentiles now share that great blessing.

Notice, however, how Peter qualified that blessing by saying that each man must turn away from his evils. That is more evidence repentance is required of us before we can receive the blessing of salvation. We must repent of our sins, and live righteously. For no man will receive eternal salvation who continues in sin.

The rulers arrest Peter and John

- **And as they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees approached them, being greatly annoyed because of their teaching the people, and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. And they threw hands on them, and put them in custody for the morrow, for it was now evening (Acts 4:1-3).**

Peter and John no doubt said many more things to the people. Remember, they healed the man at the ninth hour, 3 PM. And they were not arrested until evening. That means they must have continued preaching and teaching for at least two or three hours before they were taken in custody.

The rulers of the people had rejected and crucified Jesus because they hated him. And they still hated him because they were “greatly annoyed” when the apostles taught the people about him. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were those who arrested Peter and John. However, the Pharisees were still among the greatest of Jesus’ enemies. Why they were not mentioned in this case is not told. Perhaps they simply supported the arrest, but did not take an active part in it.

Five thousand believed

- **But many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men became about five thousand (Acts 4:4).**

The number of men who believed on the day of Pentecost, after they experienced the miracle of tongues and heard Peter preach, was three thousand. This time, in the temple after seeing the miraculous healing of the paralyzed man and hearing Peter preach, the number was five thousand. Remember, the text says that the Lord **“was adding to the church daily those being saved”** (Acts 2:47) after the church began. Perhaps the larger number who believed this time was because the people had heard more about the church, and were more receptive to believing.

The rulers question Peter and John

- **And it came to pass on the morrow, to be assembled in Jerusalem, their rulers, and elders, and scholars, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the high priestly family. And after placing them in the midst, they inquired, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this? (Acts 4:5-7).**

Caiaphas was the high priest who presided over the mock trial of Jesus in order to have him crucified. There were many men during those times whose name was John or Alexander. Who those men were at this meeting is not known. Nevertheless, there were many of the rulers there to try Peter and John.

Remember how Jesus prophesied to his apostles that they would be testifying before rulers that way, saying to them, **“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye will be brought to governors and even kings because of me, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles”** (Matthew 10:17-18). This trial of Peter and John was merely the beginning of those things happening to the church. For the New Testament tells of many others that followed.

Those rulers had heard of the great miracle of healing the paralyzed man. And so they asked Peter and John by what power, or in what name, they did it. They must surely have also heard that Peter and John were preaching Jesus to the people, because that is why they were arrested. Remember how the passage explained why they were arrested: **“... the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees approached them, being greatly annoyed because of their teaching the people, and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”**

Nevertheless, the question those rulers asked was about how Peter and John were able to perform such a great miracle. They knew that Peter and John themselves, being ordinary men, had no such ability. Therefore, they asked by what power or by what authority (in what name) they were able to do it.

Even unbelievers are awestruck by such miracles. Remember how the Pharisees kept inquiring of the blind man whom Jesus healed: **“But again they said to him, What did he do to thee? How did he open thine eyes? He answered them, I told you already,**

and ye did not listen. Why do ye want to hear it again? Do ye not also want to become his disciples?” (John 9:26-27).

In the name of Jesus the man was healed

- **Then Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we are examined today about a good deed, of a feeble man, by what this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this, this man stands here before you healthy** (Acts 4:8-10).

Peter answered them from the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember, after Jesus warned his apostles to expect such trials, he encouraged them by saying the Holy Spirit would help them: **“But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye should speak, for it will be given you in that hour what ye will speak. For ye are not who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you”** (Matthew 10:19-20). Therefore, Peter’s answer was actually God’s answer. Of course, unbelievers never recognize or acknowledge it. I hope you do.

Peter made it very plain to those rulers, **“and to all the people of Israel,”** that it was in the name of Jesus Christ (by his authority) that the paralyzed man was healed. Peter mentioned the people of Israel because he knew that the news about their miracle and of their trial would spread abroad.

Peter also made it plain to them, **“and to all the people of Israel,”** that those rulers were guilty of having crucified Jesus. Nevertheless, God raised Jesus from the dead. And it was by the power and authority of Jesus which enabled that miracle of healing.

Salvation is only in Christ

- **This is the stone that was rejected by you who build, which became into the head of the corner. And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:11-12).

Peter not only rebuked those rulers for rejecting Jesus, but he also proclaimed the complete superiority of him. God made Jesus into the cornerstone, which are figurative words indicating his primacy. Peter also proclaimed how eternal salvation is by the authority of no other man. It is only in the name of Christ that we can be saved from the condemnation of our sins. With those words Peter made it clear that all other religious beliefs were false. There was no nonsense about how there are “many paths” to the afterlife, and that we should tolerantly accept the beliefs of others.

The rulers marveled at their boldness

- **Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they are illiterate and uneducated men, they marveled. And they**

recognized them, that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who was healed standing with them, they had nothing to contradict (Acts 4:13-14).

Remember, Peter and John were commercial fishermen before Jesus called them. And in those days of expensive books and costly formal education most of the people were illiterate and uneducated. The New Testament does contain books written by Peter and John. However, there is no doubt those books were transcribed for them by men who were literate. The Holy Spirit had given some of the early Christians the power of speaking in tongues, that miraculous ability to speak unlearned languages. However, there is no record that the Holy Spirit ever enabled any of them to become literate by miraculous means.

The power of Jesus' influence and teachings transformed those who were with him. His influence and teachings especially elevated his apostles to where they could stand confidently and fearlessly in the presence of those imposing rulers. And that change in those men clearly indicated to the rulers they had been with Jesus.

Those rulers also knew they could not contradict the miracle of the healing, because the healed man was there with them. Moreover, thousands of men knew about that paralyzed man, knowing that he had been disabled all his life. Consequently, those rulers were limited in how they could oppose Peter and John.

The rulers forbid teaching about Jesus

- **But after commanding them to go outside of the council, they conferred among each other, saying, What will we do to these men? For that indeed a notable sign has happened by them, is apparent to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.**
- **But that it may not spread on further among the people, let us threaten them with threats to speak no longer in this name, to not one man. And having called them, they commanded them entirely, not to utter nor to teach in the name of Jesus** (Acts 4:15-18).

Being limited in what they could do to Peter and John, they held a private consultation together. They admitted a miracle had occurred, and that all the people in Jerusalem knew about it. Nevertheless, that powerful sign from God did nothing to change their hearts about Jesus and his church. They were still opposed to him.

Dear reader, even great miracles will not convert the hearts of men who have made their spirits evil. The only hope for such men is for them to change their own hearts away from evil. And history shows that rarely happens. Therefore my brothers, do not marvel and wonder about it. The devil has actually been in the presence of God and conversed with him. The devil has seen many great things God has done, yet he still hates and opposes him.

The only thing all those rulers could think of to oppose Peter and John was to simply command them against teaching and promoting the name of Jesus. They also threatened Peter and John if they disobeyed. What kind of threat they made is not told. They may not even

have said exactly what they would do if they disobeyed. Indeed, they probably did not know themselves how they could punish them without angering the people. Remember, they struggled to find a way to punish Jesus without angering the people. It was Judas who gave them the opportunity.

Throughout the history of the church sinful rulers have sought ways to silence those who teach the truth about Jesus and promote his cause. That opposition cycles depending upon how much sympathy and support the population has for the church. The opposition of rulers is growing these days. And they are creating more ways to oppose our efforts to proclaim the truth about Christ and his church. Their opposition has grown with the decline of faith among the population.

They would obey God not men

- **But Peter and John having replied to them, they said, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken to you rather than God, judge ye. For we are not able not to speak what we saw and heard (Acts 4:19-20).**

It was very bold of Peter and John to make that reply to the threat of the rulers. However, what they said was true and undeniable. They were committed to obey God instead of men, even if those men were rulers. And they were committed to testify the truth of what they had seen and heard. It was a powerful put-down to their threat. And what kind of rejoinder could those rulers have made? Faith in the Lord gives us the strength and boldness we need to resist the opposition and persecution that are part of being a disciple of Christ. For that strength and boldness is because of God's Holy Spirit in us. The words of the apostles were even divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The rulers could not punish them

- **And they, having further threatened, released them, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people. Since all glorified God for that which happened. For the man was more than forty years old on whom this sign of healing had occurred (Acts 4:21-22).**

Those rulers were no doubt very angry at the reply of Peter and John, who refused to hearken to them. However, as happened the same way with Jesus, the rulers feared the people because they glorified God for what Peter and John did. And when the people are aroused to anger, that is a threat to all rulers.

Peter and John report to the others

- **And after being released, they went to their own men, and reported as many things as the chief priests and the elders said to them (Acts 4:23).**

The first thing that Peter and John did after being released was to give a report to their own men. What the text means by their own men is probably the other apostles and the elders of the church in Jerusalem. Sharing the news of such things is encouraging to believers who hear.

The disciples pray and quote scripture

- **And the men who heard lifted up a voice to God with one accord, and said, Thou Master, the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all things in them. He who said through the mouth of thy boy David, Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against his Christ (Acts 4:24-26).**

Having heard the report of Peter and John, the men no doubt rejoiced. And they quickly prayed to give thanks to God. They acknowledged that he was the creator of all things. That fact is now being denied by many people because they are deluded by the false theory of evolution.

In their prayer, they then quoted from one of the psalms of David, the second one listed in the Old Testament. That passage says, **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, ...”** (Psalm 2:1-2). His anointed was Jesus Christ, because the name Christ means anointed.

The nations rage against God and his righteousness. They rage by denying him and living in sin; they even glorify sin. The vain things that the people meditate include such things as the theory of evolution, false religions, and perverse interpretations of the word of God.

Virtually every ruler has gathered together against God and Christ; even our own founding fathers. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 19:16). Yet our founding fathers completely excluded both God and Christ from our government. Is that not being against them? For Jesus said, **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters”** (Matthew 12:30). And now look at how hostile our government is to God and Christ. Our sinful rulers have outlawed them from virtually everything but the churches.

God predetermined Jesus would be rejected

- **For in truth, against thy holy Boy Jesus, whom thou anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do as many things as thy hand and thy purpose predetermined to happen (Acts 4:27-28).**

Herod and his boys mocked and ridiculed Jesus, and Pilate ordered him to be scourged and crucified. Moreover, the Gentile (Roman) occupiers and the people of Israel both took part in abusing and killing him. They were all guilty.

God had predetermined those things to happen, but he did not cause them. He predetermined that we would all sin, but he does not make any man sin. He made the world so that only his Son Jesus Christ could keep from sinning. That was to prove the spiritual and moral superiority of his only begotten Son. God predetermined those things would happen to Jesus, but he did not cause them to happen.

The full explanation of why God predetermines things but does not cause them to happen, is somewhat complicated. Therefore, I recommend you read my books *King Solomon's Advice for the World*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*, where I explain those things more fully.

Asking God for his help

- **And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy bondmen with all boldness to speak thy word, by thy stretching forth thy hand for healing, and signs and wonders to happen through the name of thy holy Boy Jesus** (Acts 4:29-30).

After honoring and praising God, and acknowledging why they were being persecuted, they asked God to bless them in their efforts to proclaim Christ and his kingdom. They asked for boldness to speak his word, in spite of the threats against them. And they asked God to reach out to heal and to perform other signs and wonders through the name of his holy Boy Jesus.

They asked for those things because they wanted to serve the Lord successfully, to show compassion to the infirm and to save souls for eternity. They wanted to walk in the steps of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As sons of God they too wanted to serve the Father.

God shows them his power

- **And when they prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness** (Acts 4:31).

The source of that shaking is not told. It could have been a small earthquake, or it could have been some kind of supernatural event that only affected the place where they were assembled. Nevertheless, it was an obvious sign to them that God heard their prayer and was pleased with it. For they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And that caused them to speak the word of God with boldness.

The Greek word for “all” in that passage is masculine. Therefore, even though women may have been present, those who spoke were all men. Former Americans recognized the God ordained subservience of women, but the devil and his disciples have misled this adulterous generation with disastrous consequences.

They were of one heart and soul

- **And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And not even one man said that anything of the things that was possessed by him was his own, but all things were common to them** (Acts 4:32).

The disciples of Christ in the early church were very united. And that was what Jesus had prayed for during the last supper with his apostles. Remember, he said, **“And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are**

one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me” (John 17:22-23).

They were so united that they shared whatever they had with each other, even to the point of treating what they had as belonging to them all. That can work wonderfully when each member is committed to justice and righteousness, and is never selfish or greedy, and never acts unavailingly. It works when each one obeys the command to love the other as they love themselves.

Otherwise, that kind of sharing cannot work. The most common place it works these days is in a loving and righteous marriage. However, with pagan America marriages now are contracts with legal rules specifying the details of ownership and privileges. Thus, half of the marriages in America now fail and they separate.

The apostles preached with great power

- **And with great power the apostles gave back the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all** (Acts 4:33).

God heard their prayer when they asked him to stretch forth his hand **“for healing, and signs and wonders to happen through the name”** of his holy Boy Jesus. And the great power the apostles had for giving back the testimony of the resurrection of Christ was indeed from the stretched out hand of God the Father. And God not only answered their prayer about those things, but he gave them all great grace. That grace no doubt included the strength and joy resulting from their strong unity. As the psalmist said, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”** (Psalm 133:1). Part of that great grace is also described in the next passage.

Giving to provide for needs

- **For not even any needy was among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling, they brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and placed them at the apostles’ feet. And it was distributed to each, according as any man had need** (Acts 4:34-35).

Since they shared all things with each other, then there were no needy among them. Moreover, as the passage says, they even sold various properties, and gave the proceeds to the apostles to distribute according to the various needs of the disciples. Placing the proceeds at the feet of the apostles no doubt symbolizes the complete surrender of them to the judgment of the apostles.

How the apostles distributed those funds is not told. However, there is an example in the Old Testament of when the people came to Moses for him to judge between them. This passage tells about it: **“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning to the evening. And when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this**

thing that thou do to the people? Why do thou sit by thyself, and all the people stand about thee from morning to evening?

“And Moses said to his father-in-law, Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a matter, they come to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor. And I make them know the statutes of God, and his laws” (Exodus 18:13-16).

When Moses’ father-in-law came to see him in the wilderness after the exodus, he saw what Moses was doing and he advised him of a better way. I will tell about another better way for the apostles when the story of a conflict arose among the disciples about aid for the needy. That story is told in Acts 6.

Barnabas contributes money

- **And Joses, who was surnamed by the apostles, Barnabas (which is, being translated, son of encouragement), a Levite, a Cypriot by nationality, having sold a field that was possessed by him, brought the money and placed it at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:36-37).**

Joses is the man Barnabas who worked with the apostle Paul to help convert the Gentiles to the good news of Christ. Those things are told farther in the book of Acts. Joses was apparently called Barnabas by the disciples because of his encouraging influence. For, as the passage says, Barnabas means son of encouragement. The word Barnabas is apparently Aramaic. And he is called by that name henceforth in the book of Acts.

Barnabas was a Levite, which was the tribe Jehovah set apart to be the priests of the Israelites. The high priesthood was from the lineage of Aaron, who was also a Levite. Barnabas was apparently born in Cyprus. He may have been one of the men who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. However, it is more probable that he changed his residence, because the passage says he had a field there. The Bible is otherwise silent about the background of Barnabas.

His relevance to this story is because he sold his field and brought the money to place at the feet of the apostles. And that example apparently encourage others to do likewise. For the next thing mentioned in Acts is a story about a man and woman who did the same thing, but they were deceitful about how they did it.

A man lied about his contribution

- **But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold property, and kept back from the price, his wife also having joint awareness. And having brought a certain part, he placed it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why did Satan fill thy heart for thee to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back from the price of the land?**
- **While it remained, did it not remain to thee? And after it was sold, it was in thine authority. Why is it that thou have placed this matter in thy heart? Thou have not lied to men, but to God (Acts 5:1-4).**

Peter immediately confronted Ananias and rebuked him for being deceitful about the gift. Notice how Peter said to him that Satan had filled his heart to lie about the price. Paul wrote about the working of Satan in the hearts of men. He called Satan **“the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). And remember how the Bible says that Satan entered into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus (see Luke 22:3-4). There is much to say about how Satan does those things, which I describe and explain in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Since Peter was a prophet, God gave him the power to see many things that men attempt to conceal. There are other examples of how prophets of God exposed the deceit of men. Apparently Ananias was ignorant of such things. Either that or he had no real faith in God and Christ. The Bible gives no other information about Ananias and Sapphira. And so we can only infer why they ever became disciples.

There are many other reasons people become members of congregations of Christ besides truly believing. They may enjoy the associations. They may find it profitable in some way. They may find it easier to manipulate such trusting souls to prey upon them. Nevertheless, all such people are the hypocrites among us. That is why every new “babe” in Christ must be tested carefully. And that is why strict discipline must always be maintained.

Notice how Peter said that as long as they had the price of the land it was within their power to use as they pleased. God blesses us in many ways, including goods and money; ways that are usually unrecognized by us. And whatever he blesses us with, he has given us the freedom to use as we decide. We are not commanded to give this or that to him. We are free to decide for ourselves as long as we do things righteously, and as long as we are generous to him and to those in need. And our contributions to his work are not subject to the laws of tithing, which was commanded in the law of Moses. We are under the law of liberty—as long as our liberty is used righteously.

God takes his life

- **And Ananias hearing these words, after falling down he expired. And great fear developed in all who heard these things. And after rising the young men wrapped him, and having carried him out they buried him (Acts 5:5-6).**

This story in the Bible is not a popular one. Indeed, I cannot ever remember hearing a sermon about how God took the life of Ananias because he simply lied about his contribution. That kind of punishment is condemned by most as being much too harsh. People do not like the strict kind of punishment that God uses.

There are examples showing how the people of Israel did not like the strictness of God’s punishment. For example, the author of the book of Hebrews said about them, **“For they did not bear that which was commanded, if even a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned”** (Hebrews 12:20). That was with reference to mount Sinai when Jehovah came down and spoke to them from it.

Another example is how they condemned Moses because of how God punished some rebels among them by causing the earth to open and swallow them (see Exodus 16:28-35). For after that punishment the text says, **“But on the morrow all the congregation of the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the**

people of Jehovah” (Numbers 16:41). Jehovah responded to that false accusation by slaying fourteen thousand seven hundred of them in a plague. The wrath of God can be very severe. Be not a fool and think God will not punish you for your sins, whether you are a disciple of Christ or not.

His wife also lied

- **And it came to pass after an interval of three hours, his wife also came in, not knowing that which happened. And Peter responded to her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much. And she said, Yes, for so much. But Peter said to her, How is it that it was agreed by you to challenge the Spirit of the Lord?**
- **Behold, the feet of those who buried thy husband are at the door, and they will carry thee out. And immediately she fell down at his feet and expired. And after coming in the young men found her dead, and having carried her out, they buried her by her husband** (Acts 5:7-10).

This very permissive generation of Americans would never have responded the way Peter did. Even Christians these days would have cried out to Peter, “What about forgiveness?” They would simply have given her a gentle warning about not being truthful, and would then have comforted her in the loss of her husband. There is no mystery why the church is now very weak.

Dear reader, if you think her punishment was too severe then you are thinking the way the world thinks, and not the way God thinks. And if you are offended by the way God thinks, then you either have no faith in him, or your faith is exceedingly weak and misled. Start studying the Bible to find out how God thinks, and begin thinking the way he does, lest you find yourself rejected on the day of judgment.

Regarding capital punishment, the church has no authority to impose that upon anyone. The only way congregations can legally punish their errant members is either by rebuking them or by withdrawing fellowship. All other methods of punishment are illegal for us. Nevertheless, our enemies are now even trying to take those two simple forms of punishment away from us. Sinful lawyers and judges are using lawsuits against us to make us completely impotent to impose any kind of discipline among us, making us weaker.

Regarding the punishment of major transgressions, God has endowed the rulers of governments to enforce justice and punish the guilty. For Paul commanded the disciples at Rome, **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves.**

“For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful

for wrath to the man who commits evil” (Romans 13:1-4). But alas, our rulers are also sinning against God by failing to enforce justice and punish properly. Read my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ* to see how they ought to apply justice.

Great fear developed

- **And great fear developed in the whole church, and in all who heard these things** (Acts 5:11).

After God struck Ananias dead because of his deceit in the church, the record said, **“And great fear developed in all who heard these things”** (Acts 5:5). And great fear also developed when people heard how God struck the man’s wife dead as well. Those who condemn having the fear of God in our hearts are promoting the cause of the devil. It was right for those people to have great fear when they heard those things. Having no fear is like having no sense of pain. It is a great liability that leads to much injury and early death.

God took the lives of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, not necessarily because they were the most deserving of sinners. God does such things to give us examples of the deadliness of sin. Remember the lesson that Jesus gave about that: **“Now some were present at the same time who informed him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. And having answered, Jesus said to them, Do ye suppose that these Galileans became sinful above all the Galileans because they have suffered such things? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all perish similarly.”**

“Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do ye think that these became debtors above all the men who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

Paul also spoke about how God’s punishment of others serve as examples to warn us. Speaking about the sons of Israel in the wilderness, Paul said, **“However with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn in the wilderness. But these things became our examples, for us not to be men who lust for evil things as those also lusted. Neither become ye idolaters as some of them, as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.”**

“Nor should we fornicate as some of them fornicated, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor should we challenge the Christ as some of them also challenged, and were destroyed by the serpents. And ye should not grumble as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”

“Now all these things happened to those men for examples, and they were written for our admonition, to whom the ends of the ages came. Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall” (First Corinthians 10:5-12).

Signs and wonders

- **And by the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders happened among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. But of the rest no man dared join them, but the people magnified them** (Acts 5:12-13).

Solomon's porch was part of the temple complex, located on the court grounds around the temple building. The original temple was destroyed by the Babylonians five centuries before Christ. However, it was rebuilt (with much less beauty and glory) by the returning exiles. A few years before Christ came the temple was renovated and the court was enlarged by the first king Herod.

The Old Testament gives a description of the original porch of Solomon: **"And Solomon was thirteen years building his own house, and he finished all his house. For he built the house of the forest of Lebanon. The length of it was And he made the porch of pillars. The length of it was fifty cubits [a cubit was about 18 inches], and the breadth of it thirty cubits, and a porch in front of them, and pillars and a threshold in front of them. And he made the porch of the throne where he was to judge, even the porch of judgment. And it was covered with cedar from floor to floor"** (First Kings 7:1-7). That porch was the place where Solomon sat in judgment of the people who came to him, like a modern courtroom.

As with Jesus, most of those signs and wonders were probably acts of healing. There was no New Testament at the beginning. The people could only know of the good news of Christ by those who testified about him. And the chief witnesses were his apostles. Therefore, in order to prove that their testimony was true, God gave them the power to perform miraculous signs and wonders. For such things can only come from God.

That kind of power was called gifts of the Holy Spirit, and it was given variously to some of the other disciples besides the apostles. Paul spoke in detail about that in his first letter to the Corinthians, when he said, **"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of services, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of functions, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man toward that which is beneficial."**

"For to one, the word of wisdom is given through the Spirit, and to another, the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to a different man, faith by the same Spirit, and to another, gifts of healings by the same Spirit, and to another, workings of miracles, and to another, prophecy, and to another, discerning of spirits, and to a different man, kinds of tongues, and to another, the interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each man individually as it wills" (First Corinthians 12:4-11).

Those miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were gradually diminished as the New Testament began to be written. And they are no longer given. Many men claim such powers, but not one of them has ever proven his authenticity. They are deceitful men who delude the people. They themselves are led astray and they lead others astray. Believe them not, lest you too be led astray by them.

With the New Testament record such powers are no longer needed to persuade men. Remember what Abraham said in one of Jesus' parables: **"If they [men] do not listen to Moses and the prophets [the Bible as it was then], neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead"** (Luke 16:31). The testimony of the New Testament is sufficient to convert the heart of any man who has the kind of spirit required to become a disciple of Christ. For Jesus said, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:27). His sheep are all who love truth and righteousness,

and are humble and open minded to hear and learn. And we now hear and learn from the testimony of the New Testament.

Many come for healing

- **And more who believe were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so as to bring the feeble to the thoroughfares, and to place them on cots and mats, so that while coming, the shadow of Peter might at the least overshadow some of them. And also the populace of the cities round about came together to Jerusalem bringing the feeble, and those tormented by unclean spirits, who were all healed (Acts 5:14-16).**

Although the text says that many signs and wonders happened by the hands of the apostles, apparently Peter had the greatest power to heal. As with Jesus, multitudes came to the apostles for healing, and thereby many of them believed and were added to the Lord. The apostles continued the work of Jesus by teaching and healing. They taught so that the people could believe and obey Christ, which would then save their souls. They healed people as evidence they were truly sent by God.

It is interesting that the Bible mentions how people with faith who touched the garment of Jesus were healed. But nothing was ever said about the power of his shadow, as is implied here with Peter. The record does mention later how items of clothing taken from Paul were used to heal: **“And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so as to even bring handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin to those who were incapacitated and to free their infirmities from them, and the evil spirits to go out from them” (Acts 19:11-12).**

Whether Peter’s shadow actually healed anyone is debated. It is certainly possible, because by the power of God he had healed with words only. Luke may have mentioned Peter’s shadow to show how much faith the people had in his power to heal, and that came from his reputation.

The rulers were filled of envy

- **But after rising up, the high priest and all those with him (being the sect of the Sadducees) were filled of envy (Acts 5:17).**

The Sadducees may have been a sect of the tribe of the Levites. And since the high priesthood was then from that sect, they had more authority over things of the temple. They were also apparently politically active, and cooperated more with the Romans. Remember also, their beliefs about God, heaven, and the afterlife differed considerably from the Pharisees, as this passage says, **“For in fact Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all” (Acts 23:8).**

Why they were envious of the apostles is not explained. However, it was probably a result of their growing influence with the population. For increased influence with people gives increased political power.

Arrested but released by a heavenly agent

- **And they threw their hands on the apostles, and put them in the public prison. But an agent of the Lord opened the prison doors by night, and after leading them out, he said, Go ye, and after standing in the temple, speak to the people all the sayings of this Life. And having heard, they entered into the temple at early morning, and taught (Acts 5:18-21).**

Those rulers had no justification to arrest and imprison the apostles. However, because they had that power they used it selfishly, abusing their authority. That is a very common practice by rulers. And it is one reason why some modern governments have many controls and safeguards against that kind of abuse. However, all such things are useless when the rulers themselves are corrupt, and their abuses are against a controversial minority like the disciples of Christ.

That agent of the Lord commanded them to go to the temple and **“speak to the people all the sayings of this Life.”** The good news of Jesus Christ does indeed contain words of life, for his good news offers the hope of eternal life. And as his disciples we are commanded to repent of our sins and change our lives to righteousness. And living righteously is the way of life. Thus, the good news of Christ is a Life, for it describes a way of life—a way of life that leads to eternal life.

The apostles were deeply committed to their Lord Christ. And those persecutions had no effect on discouraging them. Consequently, they promptly obeyed the command of the agent of the Lord, and they went to the temple early that morning and began teaching.

The rulers were perplexed

- **But the high priest having arrived, and those with him, they called the council together, and all the senate of the sons of Israel. And they sent to the prison for them to be brought. But the subordinates who came did not find them in the prison. And having returned, they reported, saying, We found the prison indeed shut in all security, and the guards standing before the doors, but after opening, we found no man inside.**
- **Now when they heard these words, the high priest, and the captain of the temple, and the chief priests, were perplexed about them, whatever this would become (Acts 5:21-24).**

Those rulers were so hardened against Christ and his church that they were blind to all of the evidence in support of Jesus. They knew about all the miraculous signs and wonders that the apostles were performing. And they saw how they were miraculously released from the prison, because there was no other way they could have gotten out. Yet those rulers steadfastly refused to accept that evidence.

Remember the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus quoted: **“By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should**

see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them” (Matthew 13:14-15).

Those rulers had so corrupted their spirits that God had made their hearts fat, their ears to hear heavily, and their eyes to be shut so that they could not learn and be healed. He had already condemned them. And there are people alive today, including rulers, that God has already condemned so that they cannot understand to turn and be healed. Nevertheless, It is not for us to judge who they are. Consequently, we must always be willing to speak to whoever will listen to us when we proclaim the good news of Christ.

The apostles were brought to the council

- **But a certain man who arrived, reported to them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people. Then after departing, the captain with the subordinates brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people, lest they would be stoned** (Acts 5:25-26).

Having heard that the apostles were teaching the people in the temple, the subordinates of the rulers went there to bring them to the council. Notice however, that they brought them peacefully, without violence. The subordinates did not use force because they feared the force of the people. The people they feared were the ones in the temple—the most devout of the Jews. Remember, most of the Jews were indifferent to Christ and his church, and they have remained that way to this day.

The high priest rebukes them

- **And having brought them, they placed them in the council. And the high priest demanded them, saying, Did we not command by an order for you not to teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem of your doctrine, and intend to bring upon us this man’s blood** (Acts 5:27-28).

The high priest reminded them of the command they were given the last time they were arrested. However, he must have forgotten their reply. They said to him, **“We must obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). The high priest did inadvertently give them a compliment when he said they had filled Jerusalem of their doctrine. For that was what the apostles were seeking.

The high priest also knew they were accusing them to the people of having murdered Jesus. And that was a very serious accusation to make, especially when it was made against the high priests. Thus, not only were the high priests filled of envy at the growing influence of the disciples, but they feared how the apostles were exposing their guilt for the death of Jesus.

Peter accuses the rulers

- **And Peter and the apostles having answered, they said, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye murdered, having hung on a tree. God exalted this man with his right hand,**

a Pathfinder and a Savior to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and also the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:29-32).

The first thing the apostles said in reply was the same as what they said when they were threatened the first time: **“We must obey God rather than men.”** And that should be the reply of every Christian to those who would command us otherwise.

Although the passage says that Peter and the apostles answered the high priest, Peter was no doubt their spokesman. He probably uttered the words and they indicated their agreement with him. In that way the words were theirs, even though Peter was the man who spoke them.

Peter and John were bold when they were confronted by the chief priests the first time. And from what Peter said this time the apostles continued to be bold before them. Peter immediately testified that the God of their fathers had raised up Jesus, after they had murdered him.

Peter spoke of Jesus as being exalted by God, and a Pathfinder and Savior, to give the people of Israel repentance and remission of sins. And they testified that they were witnesses of those things. Peter said the Holy Spirit was also a witness of those things. The Holy Spirit was a witness by empowering them to perform many signs and wonders, which things could only come from God. They were given those gifts of the Holy Spirit by God because they were obedient to him.

The record indicates that Peter only spoke a few words in reply. Yet those few words are filled with truth and wisdom. Conciseness and brevity are indications of wisdom. As you listen to men converse together, notice how the most able of them use the fewest words to convey what they want to say, while the least able take many words, which often seem to go on and on to those who are listening.

I once heard someone compare the length of a sermon with the time it took for preparation. He said that preparing an hour long sermon takes a few minutes; preparing a thirty-minute sermon takes longer; and a five minute sermon takes the longest time to prepare. Peter's few but powerful words is more evidence that the Holy Spirit was speaking through him, which is what Jesus said would happen.

When they said Jesus was hung on a tree, that meant he was hung on a wooden cross. For remember, he needed help carrying his cross (Matthew 27:32).

Notice how Peter said that God has give the Holy Spirit **“to those who obey him.”** For only the disciples of Christ can receive the Holy Spirit within them. As Jesus said, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17).

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit, and only those who believe and obey God can receive it. Nevertheless remember, that gift of the Holy Spirit—to have him dwell in us—does not include the special gifts of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles. Those special gifts were only given while the church was beginning. Now that we have the New Testament record they are no longer needed to prove that Christ was the Son of God.

The rulers wanted to kill them

- **And when they heard this, they were as being split with a saw, and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33).**

Those rulers were infuriated when they heard Peter's words. That is a characteristic of sinners. They hate being rebuked, especially being rebuked with words of truth and wisdom. And they characteristically become enraged and ready to attack with physical force. Compare the response of those wicked men with that of those in the temple who heard Peter preach his first sermon: **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now having heard this, they were pierced in the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, Men, brothers, what will we do?" (Acts 2:36-37).**

One of the proverbs of Solomon says, **"Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words"** (Proverbs 23:9). Those rulers were wicked and foolish men who refused to believe. And they despised the wisdom of Peter's words, while those men in the temple were pierced in their heart to repent, and sought from Peter and the other apostles what they should do.

Gamaliel cautions the rulers

- **But after standing up in the council, a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a law teacher, esteemed by all the people, commanded to make the apostles be outside a little while. And he said to them, Men, Israelites, take heed to yourselves what ye are going to do against these men.**
- **For before these days Theudas rose up saying himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, bonded themselves, who was killed. And all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and developed into nothing. After this man Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the registration, and drew a considerable crowd behind him. That man was also destroyed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were scattered.**
- **And now I say to you, keep away from these men, and let them go, because if the project or this work is from men, it will be overthrown, but if it is from God, ye cannot overthrow it, and perhaps ye may be found to be fighting against God (Acts 5:34-39).**

There were apparently a few wise men among those rulers, and Gamaliel was certainly one of them. He spoke his advice to them privately, which is often the most prudent way to influence a group, especially in a situation like that one. Had he advised them in the presence of the apostles, those rulers would have considered his words to be encouragement to the apostles and discouragement to them. His words would have exposed the weakness of those rulers, which would have immediately cause them to be defensive and contrary.

In private they were able to accept their weakness in dealing with the apostles. For those rulers were subject to the Roman occupying forces. And the Romans always put the maintenance of peace and order above resolving religious disputes. Had those rulers killed the apostles, they would have stirred the wrath of the Roman governor for having violated the restriction against using capital punishment without Roman approval.

Those examples that Gamaliel gave were indications of how much rebellion the Romans had to contend with among the Jews. That is one reason why the Jews were considered a very troublesome people by the Romans.

The apostles were beaten and released

- **And they were persuaded by him. And after summoning the apostles, having beat them, they commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them (Acts 5:40).**

The first time the apostles were arrested the rulers rebuked them, warned them, and then released them without harm. They could not harm them then because the people of Jerusalem were awed by their healing of the paralyzed man. This time, however, their had been no spectacular miracle to arouse the admiration of the people. Therefore, they beat them.

The law of Moses allowed men to be beaten with as many as forty stripes. However, that kind of beating allowed was nothing like the brutal beatings given by Gentiles. For the law said, **“And it shall be, if the iniquitous man is deserving to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his iniquity, by number. He may give him forty stripes. He shall not exceed, lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem debased to thee”** (Deuteronomy 25:2-3). Such lawful beatings were simply to administer punishment for minor infractions to discourage them. And they were not to be used to either injure or humiliated the guilty person.

As the rulers had done the first time, they commanded the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus. It was a hopeless command, because the apostles made it clear to them they would not obey it. The rulers probably gave that command as justification for having them beaten. For the apostles had done nothing worthy of punishment.

The apostles rejoiced

- **Indeed therefore they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were considered worthy to be treated shamefully for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they ceased not teaching and preaching good news, Jesus, the Christ (Acts 5:41-42).**

It took great faith for them to work with such zeal to ceaselessly teach and preach the good news of Jesus Christ. It took great faith for those apostles to rejoice for being treated shamefully. Having been with Jesus for so long created that great faith in them.

Being with Jesus had no such effect on Judas because Judas had corrupted his spirit and had no love of truth and righteousness. For some people, nothing can create faith in them.

Judas Iscariot and those rulers of the Jews were examples of such hopeless men. That is why Jesus commanded his apostles to shake the dust from their feet and depart when they faced such men.

It also took great faith for them to disobey those rulers, because those rulers were the chief priests. Those rulers were supposed to be the primary guardians of things toward God. They were supposed to encourage and lead the people to worship and obey God. Remember how Jesus himself commanded them to obey the scholars and the Pharisees: **“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not”** (Matthew 23:1-3).

Therefore, those chief priests were highly respected among the people. Nevertheless, we are not to obey our rulers when they command us to disobey God. That conflict is often the reason why people deny Jesus even though they believe in him. Remember what Jesus said about many who believed in him: **“Yet, nevertheless, even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42-43).

Let not the fear of being rejected by your leaders discourage you from obeying God rather than men. Strengthen your faith so that you can be as faithful to our Lord as the apostles were, even when there is the danger of being treated shamefully by your leaders, including the religious ones.

Supervising the daily assistance

- **Now in those days, the disciples being multiplied, there developed a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily assistance. And the twelve, having summoned the multitude of the disciples, they said, It is not right for us, having left the word of God behind, to serve tables.**
- **Therefore, brothers, seek ye out seven men from you being well reported, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this need. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the service of the word. And the word was pleasing before all the multitude.**
- **And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte, a citizen of Antioch, men whom they placed before the apostles. And having prayed, they laid hands upon them** (Acts 6:1-6).

The words Hellenists and Greeks were commonly applied to all Gentiles. Hence, the dispute among the disciples was between the Jews and the Gentiles. Since the Gentiles had not yet been formally recognized as being admissible for discipleship, then those Hellenists must have been proselytes that had been previously converted to the religion of the

Jews. And since there was a deep seated contempt by the Jews toward the Gentiles, it is no surprise that dispute arose among the disciples.

That kind of prejudice was very difficult for any Jew to overcome because it was instilled in them from their early childhood. I remember the deep prejudice against Negroes when I was a child, even among otherwise faithful disciples of Christ.

The apostles made a very wise decision about that dispute. Rather than attempting to arbitrate between each case, they gave the authority of judgment to seven men of the disciples. And no doubt some of those seven men were Hellenists, which meant the Gentiles were represented and could properly defend their widows. A committee of judges is much more effective than a single man with such things, especially when there is a lot of prejudice involved.

The positive reaction of the disciples reveals the good spirit they had toward each other. For it indicates they really wanted everyone treated fairly. It also indicates their complete submission to the authority of the apostles. The apostles are no longer with us, and the doctrine of apostolic succession is a false one. However, we are commanded to submit to the authority of the elders of each congregation. We are to submit about non-doctrinal decisions such as the one about the daily assistance. However, we are never to allow any authority to override any command of Christ. For Jesus is the head of the church, including every congregation of it.

The practice of laying on hands had at least two functions. It was a visible sign that the person involved was being accepted, either for authority or for some other special purpose, such as being sent on a mission. During those times it was also a way that some powers or gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the recipient. However, giving such gifts of the Holy Spirit that way no longer happens, because those special gifts could only be given by the apostles.

The disciples multiplied

- **And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a large company of the priests were obedient to the faith** (Acts 6:7).

There were no doubt many separate congregations of the church in Jerusalem. For remember, three thousand souls were added to the church that first day, the day of Pentecost. And the number who believed after witnessing the healing of the paralyzed man was five thousand. Besides having those thousands, the record says, **“And more who believe were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women ...”** (Acts 5:14). Hence, **“... the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”** Nevertheless remember, they were always a minority of the population of the city.

When the passage says that the word of God increased, that means the knowledge of it increased among the people. However, it may also mean that, as the apostles continued to teach, the doctrine of the church was developing. For example, after Paul became an apostle he wrote several letters that were about things not taught by Jesus when he was on the earth, such as woman praying with their heads covered (see First Corinthians 11). Nevertheless, that kind of increase in the word of God ended with the death of the apostles.

The priests, because of their role in Israel, they were more conscious of religious matters. That probably made them more receptive to hear about the good news of Christ. On the other hand, remember how the Pharisees had commanded that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ was to be excommunicated from the synagogue. That was no doubt a great deterrent to many of the priests. Remember this passage: **“... even many of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess, so that they would not become excommunicated from the synagogue ...”** (John 12:42).

Nevertheless, the power of the word of God, the mighty signs and wonders created by the apostles, and the growing acceptance of the church among the population, helped make a large company of the priests obedient to the faith. Moreover, membership in a synagogue was replaced with membership in a congregation of the disciples.

There is something else I must say about the growth of the church among the Jews. Those Jewish disciples did not give up their practice of obeying the laws of Moses. They simply added the good news of Christ to it. The practice of the law of Moses was a serious issue for the Gentile converts. Therefore, a special conference was later held by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem about it (see Acts 20). The law of Moses was the law of the land for the Jews. Therefore, as citizens they were obligated to it. However, the Gentiles were commanded against it.

When the book of Hebrews speaks about the people of Israel and the law of Moses, it says, **“But now he [Jesus] has obtained a superior ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a superior covenant, which has been enacted upon superior promises. For if that first one was faultless, no place would have been sought for a second. For, finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, and I will perfect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by my hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.**

“Because this is the covenant that I will ordain with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, giving my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be to them for a God, and they will be to me for a people. And they will, no, not teach each man his fellow citizen, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because all will know me, from their small as far as their great. Because I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins and their lawlessness I will no, not further remember.

“In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance” (Hebrews 8:6-13).

The law of Moses had become old and was disappearing. It disappeared totally when their country was destroyed forty years after Jesus began his ministry. For it is now impossible for anyone to obey most of its commands.

Stephen is falsely accused

- **And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. But some of those from the synagogue called Libertines, and of**

the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke (Acts 6:8-10).

Stephen was full of faith and power. He had power from the Holy Spirit to do great wonders and signs because he was full of faith. Faith is the foundation of our discipleship. And that faith can be small or it can be great; it can be little or it can be large; it can be weak or it can be strong. Faith is always dependent upon knowledge. However, knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for faith. For ultimately the degree of our faith depends upon the character of our spirit.

Many variables affect how much power we have to do good works. Faith is necessary but not sufficient for the achievement of good works. We must also have opportunities and resources. That is why we cannot judge the faith of a man only by the magnitude of his works. Remember how Jesus said that the poor widow's quadrans (two mites) was more than what the rich men were giving into the temple treasury.

Who those Libertines were is not known. It was obviously some kind of sect. Being listed with those other foreigners suggests they were a sect outside of Israel. Those foreigners were Jews but not citizens of Israel. And apparently they had their own synagogue in Jerusalem. It has been suggested they had their own synagogue because of the difficulties knowing the language of Israel, which was either Hebrew or Aramaic. There is some controversy about which was the common language in Israel during the time of the Jesus and the church.

Those men may have decided to actively oppose the teaching of the good news of Christ in order to gain more acceptance by the Jews. Remember, the Jews hated the Gentiles, and so they probably had a low opinion of those Jews who were living among Gentiles. Why they began opposing Stephen is not told. It may have been because the other Jews had opposed the apostles without success. Those men may have thought Stephen was an easier target.

Nevertheless, they were unable to argue successfully against him because he spoke with wisdom and spirit. The wisdom he used to promote the good news of Christ was too strong for whatever they said against it. The word spirit means energy. Hence, he was able to defeat them with both the wisdom of what he said and the power or energy with which he said it. The effectiveness of preaching and teaching requires both wisdom and power. Two men can say exactly the same thing, but the man having the greatest power of his speech will be much more effective with people.

Resorting to false accusations

- **Then they instigated men who said, We have heard him speaking blasphemous sayings against Moses and God. And they incited the people, and the elders, and the scholars. And after approaching, they seized him, and brought him to the council.**
- **And they put forward false witnesses who said, This man does not cease speaking blasphemous sayings against the holy place, and the law. For we**

have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us (Acts 6:11-14).

Using false accusations is a very common tactic by evil men who cannot succeed with reason. Remember, the word devil itself means false accuser. Making false accusations in the world is easy, because sanctions against it are rarely imposed. If an accusation is proven false, then the accuser simply shrugs. Nevertheless, even when accusations are proven false, the damage done to the reputation of the accused often endures.

The law of Moses contains many marvelous ways to promote truth and justice, as well as to defeat evil and wickedness. And it has an ordinance about making false accusations. It says, **“If an unrighteous witness rises up against any man to testify against him of wrong-doing, then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before Jehovah, before the priests and the judges that shall be in those days, and the judges shall make diligent inquiry.**

“And, behold, if the witness is a false witness, and has testified falsely against his brother, then ye shall do to him, as he had thought to do to his brother. So shall thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. And those who remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in the midst of thee. And thine eyes shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

O how much injustice would be defeated if men would obey such laws of God. False witnesses often do great damage to those they accuse, but they never suffer anything even when their testimony is proven false. Obeying that law would stop such injustice. Nevertheless, even believers in Christ rarely attempt to combat false accusations. Indeed, they often indulge in the gossip that arises from them. It is one of the most common of sins committed by those who claim faith in Christ.

The accusations made against Stephen were a result of perverting the words of what he had been teaching. They accused him of (1) speaking blasphemous sayings against the holy place (the temple) and the law, and (2) of claiming Jesus would destroy “this place,” meaning the temple, and change the customs that Moses delivered to them.

The good news of Christ does indeed teach against the legalism of the law. It teaches the law of liberty instead. However, such teachings are not blasphemous, because that is the preferred way of God. Indeed, the prophet Jeremiah told how Jehovah would make a new covenant with the house of Israel, which covenant is the good news of Christ.

That prophecy says, **“Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says Jehovah.**

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will give my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Jehovah.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Regarding the temple, that was the designated place where the Israelites were commanded to worship God. However, remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well: **“Woman, believe me, that the hour is coming when neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem will ye worship the Father”** (John 4:21).

The good news of Christ indeed frees men from the legalism of the law, including such requirements as worshiping at the temple. However, those enemies of Stephen called such teachings blasphemy, even though those teachings were prophesied by Jehovah himself as reported in the book of Jeremiah.

They could not justify their opposition to the good news of Christ with reason, so they resorted to false accusations and name-calling. If you want to see such evils in action among adversaries in the world, just read the daily news reports.

The look of Stephen's face

- **And all who sat in the council, having gazed upon him, saw his face like a face of an agent** (Acts 6:15).

What is meant by Stephen having his face like a face of an agent (of heaven) is not known. Therefore, we can only conjecture. Some believe it glistened with light like the face of Moses after he spoke with God. For an Old Testament passage says, **“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone by reason of his speaking with him. And when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him”** (Exodus 34:29-30).

However, Stephen had never been in the presence of God, and his face did not alarm those who saw him. Therefore, that interpretation of how his face appeared is very improbable. A more reasonable interpretation is that the face of Stephen simply had the countenance of strength and innocence. The character of his spirit was seen in the appearance of his face.

The appearance of our face has a great influence upon those who see us. One reason is, of course, because it is an inborn sign of our feelings, although men have learned to control and manipulate it. Such control and manipulation is often used to be deceptive. Nevertheless, the appearance of our face can be of much benefit toward our communications with other people.

Facial expressions are part of what is called non-verbal communication. However, I must warn you that non-verbal communication is often the least reliable way of communicating. For it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted, and like facial expressions can be manipulated to deceive. Therefore, beware of relying heavily upon non-verbal signals. And never only use appearance to judge anyone. Remember what Jesus said: **“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”** (John 7:24).

Stephen tells about Abraham

- **And the high priest said, Are these things so? And he said, Men! Brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran. And he said to him, Go forth out of thy land, and from thy kinfolk, and come into a land that I will show thee. Then after coming out of the land of the Chaldeans, he dwelt in Haran.**
- **And from there, after his father died, God resettled him in this land in which ye now dwell. And he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a footstep. And he promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, although there was no child by him.**
- **And God spoke thus: His seed would be alien in a foreign land, and they would enslave and mistreat them four hundred years. And I will judge the nation to whomever they will be in bondage, God said, and after these things they will come forth and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision (Acts 7:1-8).**

Stephen began his defense by telling them how God called Abraham, the man who was their founding father. He also told of the promise that God gave to Abraham, saying that he would give the land of the Chaldeans to him and to his seed (descendants) after him. He then told of the prophecy God gave him about their bondage in a foreign land (Egypt). And then God gave him the covenant of circumcision, which was a visible and continual reminder to every man and to every mother of a male child that they were God's chosen people.

Stephen tells about the patriarchs

- **And so he begot Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day. And Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, being envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. And God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And he appointed him governor over Egypt and his entire house.**
- **Now a famine came on all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard of grain being in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time. And during the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's race became manifest to Pharaoh. And Joseph having sent forth, he summoned Jacob his father. And all his kinfolk, in souls, were seventy-five.**
- **And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he perished, he and our fathers. And they were carried into Shechem, and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham**

bought for a price of silver from the sons of Hamor of Shechem (Acts 7:8-16).

God's promise passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and then to the twelve sons of Jacob. It was from those men that their nation developed. Joseph was one of the twelve. And Stephen told how Joseph was persecuted by the others. He also told why they all went to Egypt.

Stephen said that all of Jacob's kinfolk, in souls were seventy-five. However, the Old Testament record says that the size of Jacob's clan when he went to Egypt was seventy (see Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5). There have been various ways to attempt to explain the differences in those two numbers. For myself I will offer no suggestions here.

There is also some controversy about the purchase of the burial place. According to the Old Testament, Abraham purchased land from the sons of Heth that contained a cave he used to bury Sarah (see Genesis 23). However, Stephen says the purchase was from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. Perhaps the sons of Heth were descendants of Hamor, which would mean Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth, the sons of Hamor. Remember, when Luke gave a genealogy of Jesus, he spoke that way: **"the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham ..."** (Luke 3:34). Hence, the sons of Heth, the sons of Hamor.

Bible scholars of the past sought explanations about such difficulties, but these days most of them are skeptics, whether unbelievers or pseudo-believers. Therefore, they accept such things as part of what they claim to be many errors in the Bible. Perhaps these difficulties illustrate why Paul said to Titus, **"But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legalistic fightings, for they are useless and vain"** (Titus 3:9). It is not a sin to mention them, but rather to worry or quarrel about them.

Problems with genealogies are irrelevant to what is important. And such minor mysteries in the Bible are just too insignificant to seriously challenge confidence in it. The weight of supporting evidence for its divinity far exceeds the few things that may seem discrepant to us. In my various comments I have elaborated about some such problems to prepare you to defend against the scoffers. Scoffers seize upon such things to rail against the Bible. But their infidelity is their loss, and they will suffer the wrath of their Creator because of it, unless they repent in time.

Growth and persecution in Egypt

- **But as the time of the promise approached that God swore to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, until another king arose who had not known Joseph. This man, who cunningly victimized our race, mistreated our fathers to make their infants be placed outside in order not to keep alive** (Acts 7:17-19).

During the time of the Exodus the population had arisen to over a million souls. For when a census was later taken at mount Sinai, the record says, **"So all those who were numbered of the sons of Israel by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go forth to war in Israel, even all those who were numbered were six hundred three thousand and five hundred and fifty"** (Numbers 1:45-

46). They numbered the men able to go forth to war because God had commanded them to conquer the inhabitants of their promised land and take possession of it. Those inhabitants had become very wicked and spiritually corrupt, and they deserved extermination.

The sons of Israel multiplied so rapidly and became so numerous that the Egyptians began to fear them. Because of that fear they decided to enslave them. When that failed to curtail the growth of their population, the Egyptian Pharaoh commanded them to abandon all their newborn sons so that they would perish. They were allowed to keep their female babies because women are not a threat to rulers. Women can only be a threat when they are supported by men.

Stephen tells about Moses

- **During which time Moses was born (and he was well-formed by God) who was reared three months in his father's house. And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and reared him for a son to herself. And Moses was reared in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds (Acts 7:20-22).**

Notice how Stephen said that the baby Moses was well-formed by God. He said that because God is the force that creates every baby. I speak much more about how God continually interacts with the world and supports it in my book *Becoming Son of God for Eternity*.

Because Moses was such a well-formed baby his mother did not have the heart to expose him to the elements. So she hid him for three months. She could not hide him longer without being discovered. And that would have brought severe punishment on the family by the cruel Egyptians. The story about Moses' birth and his adoption by the daughter of Pharaoh can be read near the beginning of the book of Exodus.

The adoption of Moses was clearly providential, because God later chose Moses to lead his people from Egypt to their promised land. Being reared and educated by Egyptian royalty prepared Moses for that great task. Stephen said that Moses **"was mighty in his words and deeds."** However, when God first called Moses, he did not want to go and he kept giving excuses. Moses did not want to go, because the record says of him, **"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth"** (Numbers 12:3).

Moses was a meek man but he was not cowardly. Proof of that can be seen in the record of how he came to the aid of the oppressed. Stephen told about one of those times in the next things he says. Another example is when Moses defended some young women (see Exodus 2:15-17).

The one puzzle in what Stephen said about Moses was that he was mighty in his words. For one of the excuses Moses gave to Jehovah was about his speech. Moses said to him, **"Oh, Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou have spoken to thy servant, for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue"** (Exodus 4:10). Various conjectures have been offered to explain the difference. Some say he had developed a speech impediment. Some say it was because he could not speak Hebrew well, Hebrew being the language of the Israelites.

I believe it was because Moses was not eloquent with his words. Perhaps he was very mighty in his reasoning with words, but unskilled in expressing them. The apostle Paul seems to also have been “slow of speech.” For when he was defending himself against the false apostles who were attacking him, he quoted what they said about him: **“The letters, he says, are indeed weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is disdained”** (Second Corinthians 10:10).

Paul was apparently an awkward speaker, because his speech was disdained. However, he was very mighty in his words, which can be seen in his books of the New Testament, as well as the sermons he gave that are recorded in this book of Acts.

The people of Israel rejected Moses

- **But when a forty year time span was fulfilled by him, it came into his heart to go help his brothers, the sons of Israel. And after seeing a certain man suffering wrong, he defended him, and did vengeance for the man being oppressed, having smitten the Egyptian. And he presumed his brothers understood that, by his hand, God was giving them salvation, but they did not understand.**
- **And on the next day he was seen by them as they fought, and he was reconciling them for peace, having said, Men, ye are brothers. Why is it that ye wrong each other? But the man doing wrong to his neighbor thrust him away, having said, Who appointed thee a ruler and a judge over us? Do thou not want to kill me, as thou killed the Egyptian yesterday? And Moses fled at this word, and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he begot two sons** (Acts 7:23-29).

Here is that story as told in the Old Testament: **“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out to his brothers, and looked on their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brothers. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And he went out the second day, and, behold, two men of the Hebrews were striving together. And he said to him who did the wrong, Why do thou smite thy neighbor? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Do thou think to kill me, as thou killed the Egyptian?”**

“And Moses feared, and said, Surely the thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock” (Exodus 2:11-17).

Moses dwelt with that priest of Midian and he eventually married one of his daughters. Notice the strong sense of justice and righteousness that Moses had. He not only defended the Israelite man being smitten by the Egyptian, but he also defended those young women from the oppression of the shepherds at the well.

I have read how many men these days accuse Moses of being a murderer for having killed that Egyptian. However, God never accused him of it, nor did anyone else in the Bible, including Stephen. Whatever happened in that confrontation with the Egyptian, it is clear that Moses was fully justified in killing him. Moses hid the body in the sand because he knew that the Egyptians had no qualms about oppressing the Israelites, and they would have punished Moses regardless of his justification.

Moses lived a comfortable and secure life as a prince of Pharaoh. However, his great sense of justice and righteousness (and the Spirit of God within him) caused Moses to want to help his brother Israelites in their oppression. Yet they did not understand, nor did they come to his defense as he had come to theirs. For when the man doing wrong to his neighbor snarled back when Moses chided him, the record says nothing about any of the others supporting Moses. And that was no doubt a great disappointment to him. Especially since he was attempting to reconcile the two men.

The Lord appears to Moses

- **And forty years having been fulfilled, an agent of the Lord appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in a flame of fire of a bush. And when Moses looked, he wondered at the sight. And as he approached to examine, a voice of the Lord came to him, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Acts 7:30-31).**

Here is the first part of that story in the Old Testament: **“Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. And the agent of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.**

“And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Do not draw near here. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place on which thou stand is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:1-6).

Moses had spend the first forty years of his life as a prince of Pharaoh. He had spent his next forty years as a shepherd in the land of Midian. That land included parts of the Sinai Peninsula. Hence, Moses not only learned the ways of living with Egyptian royalty, but he also learned the ways of living in the wilderness of Sinai. Thus, he was prepared for the mission that God had planned for him. And he spent the last forty years of his life leading the sons of Israel to their promised land.

The Lord told Moses he was the God of his fathers, meaning his forefathers. He was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Those were times of extreme polytheism. Every land had its own god, which they worshipped and trusted would help them. Therefore, God made clear to Moses who he was.

Remember, when the scriptures say that God appeared or spoke to someone, it usually means he appeared or spoke through one of his agents. The agent is who appeared and

spoke, but the words were those of God. In that story the agent of the Lord appeared in a burning bush, a bush that was not consumed by the fire.

The Lord sends Moses to deliver them

- **But Moses, who developed trembling, dared not examine. And the Lord said to him, Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place on which thou stand is holy ground. Having looked, I saw the oppression of my people in Egypt, and I heard their groaning, and I came down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt (Acts 7:32-34).**

Here is the rest of that story in the Old Testament: **“And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And Jehovah said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite.**

“And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou may bring forth my people the sons of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:6-10).

Moses dared not examine the flame of fire of the bush, because he had learned to properly fear God. Sinners who do not fear God have no regard for things sacred and holy. Indeed, many of them are openly contemptuous of things sacred and holy. They love filth and despise purity. They love lawlessness and violence, and despise peace and order. I see evidence of those things almost every day when I watch television.

God must have changed the bare earth that Moses was standing upon to something pure and clean. Perhaps it was like what Jehovah stood upon later when Moses and the other rulers went up on mount Sinai to see him. Jehovah had taken on a human form whenever he met with Moses. And about that meeting, the passage says, **“Then Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up. And they saw the God of Israel. And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. And he laid not his hand upon the nobles of the sons of Israel. And they beheld God, and ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11).**

Remember, the Jehovah they saw was Christ, the Son of God (see First Corinthians 10:4). The name Jehovah sometimes refers to the Father, sometimes to the Son, and sometimes to them both. You must examine the context to see how it is being used.

God had prophesied to Abraham how his seed (descendants) would be oppressed in a foreign land. For he said to him in a dream, **“Know of a certainty that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs. And shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13).** When that time had passed God appeared to Moses, and called him to lead his people. When God mentioned the oppression of his people, it was no doubt to help motivate Moses to deliver them.

Moses was chosen by God

- **This Moses whom they refused, having said, Who appointed thee a ruler and a judge? This man God sent, a ruler and a liberator by the hand of the agent who appeared to him in the bush. This man brought them forth after performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years (Acts 7:35-36).**

Although the sons of Israel refused Moses when he came to help them, God chose him to be their ruler and their liberator. And with the power of God, he performed many wonders and signs to the people of Egypt, and in crossing the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Few people are aware that God did not intend to keep the people wandering in the wilderness that long. It was a curse he brought upon them because of their continual rebellion. That curse said, **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation that murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the sons of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say to them, As I live, says Jehovah, surely as ye have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you.**

“Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And all who were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, surely ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore that I would make you dwell in it, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

“But your little ones, that ye said would be a prey, them I will bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your whoredoms, until your dead bodies be consumed in the wilderness.

“After the number of the days in which ye spied out the land, even forty days, for every day a year, ye shall bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my alienation. I, Jehovah, have spoken, surely I will do this to all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die” (Numbers 14:26-35).

A prophet like Moses

- **This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, the Lord our God will raise up a prophet for you, from your brothers, like me (Acts 7:37).**

That prophecy was about Jesus Christ. For he was both a law-giver and a leader of the chosen people of God, as was Moses. Jesus replaced the law of Moses with the laws of his good news of our salvation, which is a law of liberty not a legal system like the law of Moses. And he is the leader of the new chosen people of God, which is the church, the kingdom of God. Stephen was making clear to those who were judging him that he was not guilty of speaking blasphemous sayings, as he had been accused.

The passage that Stephen was referring to is this one: **“Jehovah thy God will raise up for thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brothers, like me. Ye shall hearken to him, according to all that thou desired of Jehovah thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Jehovah my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I not die.**

“And Jehovah said to me, They have well said that which they have spoken. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The sons of Israel rebelled against God

- **This is he who became in the congregation in the wilderness with the agent who spoke to him on the mount Sinai, and of our fathers who received living oracles to give to us. To whom our fathers did not want to become obedient, but they thrust away, and turned back in their heart to Egypt, after saying to Aaron, Make gods for us who will lead us. For this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has happened to him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered up sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands** (Acts 7:38-41).

As soon as the sons of Israel arrived at mount Sinai, God told the people he would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Here is what the text says: **“And Moses went up to God. And Jehovah called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus thou shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself.**

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be my own possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shall speak to the sons of Israel.

“And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which Jehovah commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that Jehovah has spoken we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to Jehovah” (Exodus 19:3-8).

Notice how the people said they would obey all that Jehovah had spoken to them. The sons of Israel had experienced many great signs and wonders that God had performed in Egypt and during their exodus from it. And soon after they arrived at mount Sinai they even heard his mighty voice speak the ten commandments to them from the mountain. He spoke with such power that the people were afraid to hear God speak any more. For the text says, **“And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die”** (Exodus 20:18-19).

Yet not long afterward they completely forsook God to worship a molten calf they made from the gold of their earrings. And that is what Stephen spoke about. The Old Testament record says, **“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, Up, make gods for us, which shall go before us. For as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him”** (Exodus 32:1). As the psalmist said of them, **“They made a calf in Horeb [mount Sinai], and worshiped a molten image. Thus they changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats grass”** (Psalm 106:19-20).

God turned and gave them over

- **But God turned, and gave them over to serve the host of heaven, just as it is written in the book of the prophets, Did ye offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, the images that ye made to worship them. And I will deport you beyond Babylon** (Acts 7:42-43).

The passage that Stephen quoted was this one: **“Did ye bring sacrifices and offerings to me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? Yea, ye have borne the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, your images which ye made to yourselves. Therefore I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts”** (Amos 5:25-27).

The captivity beyond Damascus that Amos mentioned refers to their exile to Babylon after that empire conquered them. The Old Testament is filled with warnings that God gave the people of Israel because of their sinfulness. Their history is a recurring cycle of rejecting God for sinfulness, and then returning to him after suffering the harmful consequences. However, the trend was always downward, each generation becoming worse than the one before them.

As Jehovah said through his prophet Jeremiah, **“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not to me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff. They did worse than their fathers”** (Jeremiah 7:25-26).

When there was no longer any hope for them—no remedy—then God sent the Chaldeans (Babylon was their capital) to destroy their nation and scatter them abroad. As the record says, **“And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy.**

“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon

young man or virgin, old man or hoary-headed. He gave them all into his hand” (Second Chronicles 36:15-17).

The people of Israel were generally more righteous than the Gentile world. However, that is not saying much, because the world has always been a very sinful place. Like ancient Israel, Christian America was more righteous than the pagan world, but like ancient Israel they have abandoned God for the ways of the devil. I am hoping and praying there will be a spiritual revival to bring them out of this evil downturn of faithlessness and moral decadence. I fear we may need to suffer some terrible consequences before the people awaken out of their spiritual stupor, repent, and turn back to Jesus Christ.

Stephen gives a little more history

- **The tabernacle of the testimony was with our fathers in the wilderness, just as he arranged (he who spoke to Moses), to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. Which also our fathers, having received in succession, brought in with Joshua into the possession of the nations whom God drove out from the presence of our fathers, until the days of David who found favor in the sight of God.**
- **And he asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob, but Solomon built him a house. However the Most High does not dwell in man-made temples, just as the prophet says, The heaven is to me a throne, and the earth a footstool of my feet. What house will ye build for me? says the Lord. Or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things? (Acts 7:44-50).**

The tabernacle was a portable tent that the people took with them during their travels in the wilderness. (God commanded that tent, and it is described in Exodus 25-30 and 35-39.) It was where the ark of the covenant was kept, which contained the stone tablets having the ten commandments engraved on them. It was where Jehovah met with Moses to give him most of the laws and commandments for the people. As one passage says, **“And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with him, then he heard the Voice speaking to him from above the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, and he spoke to him”** (Numbers 7:89).

About five hundred years after the tabernacle (the tent of meeting) was built David wanted to build a more permanent house for God—a temple. The passage Stephen quoted about building a temple for God is this one: **“Thus says Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What manner of house will ye build to me, and what place shall be my rest? For all these things my hand has made, and all these things came to be, says Jehovah. But to this man I will look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word”** (Isaiah 66:1-2).

David was a righteous and just man who was very zealous for Jehovah. Therefore, he found favor in the sight of God. David did many good and mighty works for God. There was only one time when David displeased God, and that was when he sinned against Uriah the Hittite. He committed adultery with his wife, and then had him killed. It was a horrible

sin that he repented of, and it grieved him for the rest of his life. He also suffered a life long curse from God because of that sin. Nevertheless, he was one of the great men of God during Old Testament times. That is why Stephen mentioned him.

Stephen rebukes them severely

- **Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it (Acts 7:51-53).**

That was a severe rebuke against those Jews, and they deserved it. They were just like the sons of Israel were during the time of Moses. For near the time of his death, Moses said to them, **“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you”** (Deuteronomy 9:24). Those Jews who were trying Stephen had rejected the Christ and were persecuting his church. They were being rebellious against God just as those Israelites were during the time of Moses.

During his speech to defend himself Stephen had given them examples of how they had resisted the Holy Spirit throughout their history. They had resisted the Holy Spirit and persecuted God’s prophets, even killing those who foretold the coming of the Christ. And Stephen quoted many Old Testament passages as proof. Those Jews deserved being rebuked. Indeed, they deserved much more than a rebuke, but that is all Stephen could do about them: expose their sinfulness and rebuke them.

Notice how Stephen did not even attempt directly to refute the false accusations made against him: **“And they put forward false witnesses who said, This man does not cease speaking blasphemous sayings against the holy place, and the law. For we have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us”** (Acts 6:13-14). Instead, he gave scriptural evidence in support of what he was doing, and he rebuked those elders and scholars as hypocrites who were continuing to oppose God’s Holy Spirit just as their forefathers had done.

Remember what Jesus said to the Jews about that: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So then ye testify to yourselves that ye are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Then fill ye up the measure of your fathers.

“Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how will ye escape from the damnation of hell? Because of this, behold, I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scholars. And some of them ye will kill and crucify, and some of them ye will scourge in your syna-

gogues, and will persecute from city to city, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, that all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:27-36).

They were filled with fury

- **Now when they heard these things, they were split with a saw in their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth against him (Acts 7:54).**

Instead of searching their souls and repenting, those Jews became furious and full of hate against him. Sinners hate being rebuked whether they deserve it or not. And they hate every man who rebukes them. Remember this proverb of Solomon: **“Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words”** (Proverbs 23:9).

Stephen had no choice but to speak to those foolish and wicked Jews. They had charged him falsely and he was defending himself. Moreover, he would not be cowardly and shun his duty to teach and rebuke them. He obeyed the will of God for us. That will was what Paul later wrote to his disciple Timothy when he said, **“I solemnly testify therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is going to judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, stand ready in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”** (Second Timothy 4:1-2).

Moreover, Stephen was actually speaking the words of the Spirit of God himself, because Jesus had said to his disciples, **“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye will be brought to governors and even kings because of me, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye should speak, for it will be given you in that hour what ye will speak. For ye are not who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you”** (Matthew 10:17-20).

Stephen has a vision of Jesus

- **But being full of the Holy Spirit, having gazed into heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, Look, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56).**

That was an astonishing vision Stephen had. That vision indicates to me how much Jesus loved him. And it reminds me of this passage from the Psalms: **“Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his sanctified”** (Psalm 116:15). Jesus knew that they were going to kill Stephen, and he must have wanted everyone there to know how much he approved of him and of what he said to those evil rulers. Those who hated Stephen rejected any testimony he gave. But those who were his Christian brothers were no doubt greatly encouraged by what he saw. They grieved about how he was being attacked, but they surely rejoiced that Jesus was showing his support of Stephen.

They stoned Stephen

- **But they, having cried out in a great voice, held their ears shut, and rushed upon him with one accord. And having expelled him out of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments beside the feet of a young man called Saul.**
- **And they stoned Stephen, who was calling and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And having knelt down, he cried out in a great voice, Lord, place not this sin to them. And after saying this, he slept. And Saul¹ was approving the killing of him (Acts 7:57-8:1).**

Stephen had appeared before the council, but it was a mob that stoned him. That indicates the council held their trial of Stephen outside in public. Therefore, all the people there heard what Stephen said. And having rejected his rebuke they turned into a vicious mob. They made no attempt to respond to Stephen with reason, but only with violence. And they became so enraged that they immediately stoned him to death. They made no effort to be lawful, but behaved lawlessly and ruthlessly, which is typical of our enemies. That is exactly what the Jews did to Paul many years later when he tried to reason with a multitude of the Jews (see Acts 22:22-23). Paul had become a very fruitful disciple of Christ. For Jesus appeared to him in a vision and appointed him to be one of his apostles.

While Stephen was being killed he prayed that God would not place that sin to them. He knew that many of them were deceived and thought they were serving God. And Paul was one of those kind of men, because he approved the killing of Stephen. Paul was a righteous and God-fearing man who was zealous for the ways of the Lord, which is why Jesus later chose him.

A great persecution and scattering

- **And on that day there developed a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men arranged to bury Stephen, and they made great lamentation over him.**
- **But Saul was ravaging the church, entering from house to house. Dragging both men and women, he gave them over to prison. Indeed therefore those who were scattered abroad passed through proclaiming the good news, the word (Acts 8:1-4).**

God no doubt knew that great persecution would develop. That may be another reason why he appeared in that vision to Stephen while he was being stoned. For his testimony about it informed his fellow Christians that God approved what Stephen had said and done. Otherwise, they may have thought Stephen made a great mistake by rebuking those

1. The young man named Saul was later called Paul, which is the name everyone now uses for him. Henceforth in my commentary, even though the Bible text refers to him as Saul, I will use his more familiar name Paul in my comments.

Jews so severely, because of the great persecution it aroused. Having no doubts about the righteousness of Stephen's words, devout men arranged to bury him, and they mourned greatly at the loss of him.

That persecution was so great that it scattered the church away from Jerusalem to all the regions of Judea and Samaria. Only the apostles were not scattered, but remained in Jerusalem. That persecution and scattering were painful for the disciples, but it was beneficial in promoting the growth of the church. For when they were scattered they proclaimed more widely the good news of Christ.

As the passage says, Paul was very active in that persecution, probably the most active of all the Jews. For he vigorously attacked the church, ravaging it. He even entered from house to house to drag the believers, both men and women, to cast into prison. After his conversion to Christ, Paul grieved greatly about what he had done.

Even though God forgave him, Paul never forgot it. For he later wrote, **"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And his grace for me did not become empty, but I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me"** (First Corinthians 15:9-10). He was a very humble and righteous man, even though he had first been a vicious enemy of Christ and his church.

Philip preaches to the Samaritans

- **And Philip, who went down to a city of Samaria, proclaimed the Christ to them. And the multitudes unanimously heeded the things that were spoken by Philip during their listening and seeing the signs that he did.**
- **For of many of those who had unclean spirits, they came out, crying in a great voice. And many who were paralyzed, and who were lame, were healed. And there became great joy in that city** (Acts 8:5-8).

This man Philip is not identified. But he could not have been the apostle Philip, as the text later proves (see Acts 8:14:17). Some believe he was one of the seven men chosen to assist in the daily assistance to the widows. However, exactly who he was is irrelevant. The important thing is that he was a faithful disciple of Christ who had been given gifts of the Holy Spirit to heal and to cast out unclean spirits, and he was spreading the good news of Christ.

Remember, the Samaritans were a half-breed people resulting from Israelites marrying Gentiles. And as a result the Jews rejected them, because God had commanded his people against intermarrying with Gentiles. Consider these words of Ezra to the Jews who returned from their Babylonian exile to rebuild their country: **"And Ezra the priest stood up, and said to them, Ye have trespassed, and have married foreign women to increase the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession to Jehovah, the God of your fathers, and do his pleasure, and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women"** (Ezra 10:10-11).

Being a half-breed people the Samaritans had created a hybrid religion containing some things from the law of Moses. And they too were expecting the coming Messiah. Remem-

ber what the Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus: **“I know that Messiah comes, he who is called Christ. When that man comes he will declare all things to us”** (John 4:25).

Those Samaritans of that city were expecting Christ to come, and so when Philip preached to them they accepted Jesus as the Christ. Especially when they saw the miraculous signs that Philip did. Consequently, there was much joy in that city, which was no doubt both from all the healings of their infirm, and from becoming a part of the kingdom of God through Christ. Both bodies and souls were healed there.

Simon a sorcerer

- **But a certain man in the city, Simon by name, was formerly practicing sorcery, and fascinating the nation of Samaria, saying himself to be some great man, to whom they gave heed, from small to great, saying, This man is the great power of God. And they heeded him, because he fascinated them for a considerable time with the sorceries** (Acts 8:9-11).

Simon was clearly a master illusionist, which in modern times is also called a magician. All sorcerers are illusionists, because only God has supernatural powers. And God only gives such powers to those who serve him, men such as Philip. Not only was Simon an illusionist, but he was a disciple of the devil because he used his tricks to deceive the people into thinking he actually had supernatural powers from God. For every illusionist knows he is using clever tricks.

Many believed, including Simon

- **But when they believed Philip preaching good news, the things about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were immersed, both men and women. And Simon himself also believed. And after being immersed, he was continuing with Philip. And seeing miracles and signs occurring, he was astonished** (Acts 8:12-13).

Notice how the passage says those who believed the good news of Christ were immersed. They were immersed in obedience to Jesus' command that says, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:16). And that immersion is in water, as shown by numerous other passages in the New Testament. For example, Jesus said, **“If any man is not begotten from water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

And that immersion is a burial and new birth, as Paul said: **“Or are ye ignorant that as many as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into his death? We were buried therefore with him through the immersion into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life. For if we have become co-planted in the likeness of his death, then we will also be of the resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be inactivated, no longer to enslave us to sin”** (Romans 6:3-6). Therefore, let no man deceive you.

Simon was astonished when he saw the miracles and signs occurring by Philip, because he knew that his sorceries were mere illusions. And the things Philip was doing were no illusions. Simon could see that because illusionists are also skilled in detecting illusions.

Peter and John give them the Holy Spirit

- **Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria has received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they came down, prayed for them, so that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it was not yet fallen upon any of them. They were only immersed in the name of the Christ Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).**

Every man who repents of his sins and is immersed for the remission of them is given the gift of the Holy Spirit. That means he becomes a child of God and a member of his kingdom. Remember what Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost: **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38).

However, there were also special gifts of the Holy Spirit that a man could receive, gifts that gave power to perform various miracles. And only the apostles had the power to pass on those gifts. That is why Peter and John were sent to the new Samaritan converts. And that is proof that the Philip who went there was not the apostle Philip.

Regarding those powers, remember, the New Testament had not yet been written. And those special powers were used as proof that the teachings of the good news of Christ were from God. But now the testimony of the New Testament alone is sufficient for proof. That power, therefore, was no needed, and so it passed away after the death of the apostles.

Simon tries to buy the power

- **Now when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he brought money to them, saying, Give me also this power, so that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit**
- **But Peter said to him, Thy silver with thee, may it be for destruction, because thou thought to obtain the gift of God by money. There is no part nor lot for thee in this matter, for thy heart is not straight in the sight of God.**
- **Repent therefore from this thine evil, and beg God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart will be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of unrighteousness. And having answered, Simon said, Beg ye to the Lord for me, so that none of which things ye have spoken may come upon me (Acts 8:18-24).**

Peter said that Simon's request indicated he was **“in the gall of bitterness and the bond of unrighteousness.”** He was probably envious of the apostles who had that power.

Remember, before Philip came and preached to the people, Simon was venerated as being “the great power of God.” He lost that standing in the eyes of the people when Philip came. It is obvious from that story that Simon had not genuinely repented of his sins. There is no indication he confessed being an illusionist, and he tried to buy the gift of God that Peter and John had.

Nothing more is ever said in the New Testament about Simon. We can only hope he truly repented and forsook his bitterness and unrighteousness. For when Peter rebuked him, Simon became fearful and besought Peter to ask God not to punish him.

Preaching to other Samaritans

- **Indeed therefore, having solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, and preached the good news in many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25).**

Philip’s success evangelizing the Samaritans of that city encouraged Peter and John to preach to other Samaritans as they journeyed back to Jerusalem. That was another step in the process of preaching the good news of Christ to the whole world. They went from preaching only to the Jews, to preaching to the Samaritans, and then later preaching to the Gentiles. And it has been the Gentiles who spread the church throughout the world.

Philip is sent to the Ethiopian eunuch

- **And an agent of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desolate region. And after rising, he went. And behold a man, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a high official of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship. And he was returning, and sitting in his chariot, and reading the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:26-28).**

How that agent of the Lord spoke to Philip is not told. It is another one of those trivial details that are unimportant. Regardless of how he spoke to him, Philip obeyed and began his journey. How far he went before he saw the Ethiopian eunuch is also not told. I would guess it was not very far, because Philip overtook him.

Whether the man was born a eunuch or made that way is not told. Remember what Jesus said about eunuchs: **“For there are eunuchs who were born this way from their mother’s belly, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of the heavens. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it”** (Matthew 19:12). Men were made eunuchs for various reasons. You can read about them in secular literature.

Also, whether the man was a proselyte or a Jew who was a citizen of Ethiopia is not told. Remember, the sons of Israel had been scattered among the nations when their country was conquered a few centuries before Christ. And just as today, many of them chose not to return to Israel when it was rebuilt.

He invites Philip to join him

- **And the Spirit said to Philip, Go near, and be joined to this chariot. And after running near, Philip heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. And he said, Do thou also really understand the things that thou read? And he said, For how can I unless some man may guide me? And he encouraged Philip, after coming up, to sit with him (Acts 8:29-31).**

It is interesting that Philip was able to hear the man reading the prophet Isaiah. Apparently the man was reading aloud and to himself. For nothing is said about anyone else being with him. Perhaps reading aloud while riding in a chariot gave him more attention to what was written. It is easier for the mind to drift while reading silently, especially when riding in something like a chariot.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading a book of prophecy, which was why he needed some man to guide him. For most prophecies could not be understood without being explained. And most could not be explained until they had been fulfilled. There are a few exceptions to that, however. For example, the prophecy Joshua received about the defeat of Jericho foretold the walls of the city falling down flat. And that prophecy was easily understood before it happened.

He asks Philip to explain a scripture

- **Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb, mute before shearing him, thus he opened not his mouth. In his lowly condition his justice was taken away. And who will describe his generation, because his life was taken from the earth?**
- **And having answered, the eunuch said to Philip, I ask thee, about whom does the prophet say this, about himself, or about some other man? (Acts 8:32-34).**

The Old Testament scripture the eunuch read was this one: **“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living ... ?”** (Isaiah 53:7-8). That scripture is part of a much larger passage that prophesies about the Christ and what he would be like (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). That larger passage is the most detailed prophecy about the life of Christ.

The passage the eunuch quoted describes the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus is called the Lamb of God because he did not live like the wicked predators among men. He was a gentle and peace loving man. And he did not fight to resist his arrest, nor did he fight to resist being crucified. His justice was taken away because he was accused and condemned falsely. Moreover, his generation of God’s people, the sons of Israel, rejected him.

Philip teaches him the good news

- **And Philip having opened his mouth, and having begun from this scripture, he preached the good news to him—the man Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch says, Look, water! What prevents me to be immersed? And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he immersed him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:35-39).**¹

Remember, on the day of Pentecost, Peter persuaded the Jews that they had crucified the Christ. And when they asked what they could do, he said to them, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). That is probably what Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch he needed to do. Consequently, as soon as the eunuch saw a place with enough water to be immersed, he asked what would prevent him being immersed. Like the Jews on the day of Pentecost, he wanted to obey as soon as possible.

Notice the evidence in that passage that the rite of immersion is truly immersion in water. For it says they both went down into the water, and they both came up out of the water. That should be proof enough to anyone who wants to know the truth about that ritual and the necessity of it. He who compromises the commands of God does so at his peril.

Notice also how the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing. He rejoiced because he knew how beneficial that act was. It made him a son of God in God’s eternal kingdom, with the hope of everlasting life.

How the Spirit caught away Philip is not told. However, there are three passages in the Old Testament that tell how the prophet Ezekiel was taken up by the Spirit of God. The first one says, **“So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away. And I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me. Then I came to those of the captivity at Tel-abib, who dwelt by the river Chebar, and to where they dwelt. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days”** (Ezekiel 3:14-15). The bitterness Ezekiel felt was probably because of that very stressful experience.

The second time mentioned about Ezekiel being taken up says, **“And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the lord Jehovah fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and, lo, a likeness as the appearance of fire, from the appearance of his loins and downward, fire, and from his loins and upward, as the appearance of brightness, as it were glowing metal.**

“And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head. And the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the gate of the inner court that looks toward the north,

1. Note: Acts 8:37 was omitted from the ACV Bible because it is not in the majority of the Greek manuscripts.

where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the appearance that I saw in the plain” (Ezekiel 8:1-4).

The third time says, “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. And his voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar. And I fell upon my face. And the glory of Jehovah came into the house by the way of the gate whose view is toward the east. And the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court, and, behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house. And I heard speaking to me out of the house, and a man stood by me” (Ezekiel 43:6).

From those examples about Ezekiel it seems most probable that Philip was literally taken up by the Spirit of the Lord. Although his relocation could have been instantaneous.

Philip teaches throughout cities

- **But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through all the cities he preached the good news until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40).**

Azotus was called Ashdod in the Old Testament. Ashdod was a city of the Philistines located west of Jerusalem and near the coast of the Mediterranean sea. Caesarea was a sea-port city on the Mediterranean sea. It was built by the first Herod, and was located about seventy miles north of Azotus.

Notice how Philip continued to preach the good news of Christ as he traveled. And he probably continued using the gifts of the Holy Spirit he was given, which enabled him to show signs and wonders to attract attention and prove he had been sent by God.

No doubt most of the things done in the early church were not recorded and preserved for us to read about. What we have is sufficient for us to believe and to learn about the will of God for us. Remember what John said about the works of Jesus: “**And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly**” (John 21:25).

Paul continues to attack

- **But Saul, still breathing threat and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, after going to the high priest, he requested letters from him for Damascus, to the synagogues, so that if he found any who were of the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).**

The Bible does not explain why Paul was so energetic in his attacks against the church. What it does say about him indicates he was a young man who was exceedingly devoted to God, and he thought his efforts would be a way to please him. For the Old Testament

record gives many examples of how God condemned false religions, and Paul was convinced the good news of Christ was false and a threat to the law of God.

Here is one explanation, that Paul later gave, why he persecuted the church of Christ: **“Indeed therefore I thought it necessary for myself to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which also I did at Jerusalem. And I locked up many of the sanctified in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were killed, I gave a vote against them. And punishing them often at all the synagogues, I compelled them to blaspheme. And being extraordinarily furious toward them, I persecuted them even as far as to outside cities”** (Acts 26:9-11).

That reference to the good news of Christ as the Way is the first time it is mentioned in this history of the early church. And it is a very apt designation, because the good news of Christ is a way of life. It is not only a way of life but it is *the* Way of life. It is the Way of life that God wants of all men. It is the only way of life that produces full righteousness and enables us to become sons of God for eternity. Incidentally, referring to the good news of Christ as the Way occurs six times in the book of Acts, and once in the book of Hebrews.

Paul has a vision of Jesus

- **And on going, it came to pass for him to approach Damascus. And suddenly there shone around him a light out of heaven. And after falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? And he said, Who are thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and enter into the city, and it will be told thee what thou must do.**
- **And the men who traveled with him had stopped, speechless, indeed hearing the voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the ground. And when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. But they brought him into Damascus, leading him by the hand** (Acts 9:3-8).

How long God allowed Paul to persecute his church is not told. It was probably from several weeks to several months. God allows us to sin against him for many reasons. Indeed, there are many reasons why he allows evil of any kind to happen. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus revealed himself to Paul after he had persecuted him for a while. Paul was persecuting Jesus because Paul was persecuting his disciples. Several times Jesus taught that whatever we did to or for any of his disciples was the same as doing it to or for Jesus himself. For example, remember this lesson: **“But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy agents with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from each other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will truly place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.**

“Then the King will say to those at his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was

hungry, and ye gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in, naked, and ye clothed me. I was feeble, and ye came to help me. I was in prison, and ye came to me.

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, and fed thee, or thirsting, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked, and clothed thee? And when did we see thee weak, or in prison, and came to thee? And having answered, the King will say to them, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as ye did it to one of these my brothers, the least, ye did it to me” (Matthew 25:31-40).

The book of Acts tells how Paul reported his vision to others on two separate occasions. One of those occasions was when he was defending himself to a mob of Jews who cast him out of the temple. Here is that part of his defense: **“And there happened to me, while going and approaching Damascus about noon, suddenly to flash forth from heaven a great light around me. And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me?”**

“And I answered, Who are thou, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom thou persecute. And those who were with me indeed saw the light and became afraid, but they heard not the voice of him who spoke to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, After rising, go into Damascus, and there it will be told thee about all things that have been assigned for thee to do” (Acts 22:6-10).

The second time that Paul reported his vision was when he was defending himself to the Roman governor because of accusations made against him by the high priest and other rulers of the Jews. Here is that part of his defense at that time: **“And during which, while going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the road a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, which shone around me and those who went with me. And when we all fell to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.”**

“And I said, Who are thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and stand upon thy feet, for I appeared to thee for this, to appoint thee an assistant and a witness both of things that thou saw, and of the things that I will make visible to thee, delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes to turn about from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, for them to receive remission of sins and a lot among those who have been sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:12-18).

Notice how the information that Paul reported that time was more than in the original description, especially in his second report. That is just another example of how the Bible is written. Many times reports about the same event will vary because few reports in the Bible contains all the details. Paul’s second report was more detailed because of different circumstances. For when Paul was accused of being mad because of the things he was saying, Paul said, **“I am not mad, eminent Festus [a Roman governor], but I speak forth sayings of truth and soberness. For the king knows about these things, before whom I also speak boldly. For I am convinced not any of these things, nothing, to be hidden from him. For this was not done in a corner”** (Acts 26:25-26).

Also notice in his first report how Paul said that those who were with him saw the light but did not hear the voice of him who spoke. However, the original description says that the men traveling with him heard the voice but saw no man. There is no contradiction because the difference is that the word voice was used in two different senses. Hence, putting those reports together simply says that the men with Paul heard the voice speaking to him but they did not understand what was being said. They may have merely heard sounds, or they may have heard words they could not understand. Either way they did not “hear” in the sense of comprehending.

I say more about Paul’s vision farther in the book.

Paul was in shock

- **And he was three days not seeing, and did not eat or drink (Acts 9:9).**

The spectacular vision that Paul experienced changed his life. There was probably nothing else that could have happened to Paul to give him a greater shock. He was extremely zealous for God and his ways, and he had committed himself wholeheartedly to fight for him. That vision proved to Paul that instead of fighting *for* God he was fighting *against* him.

I suspect that during those three days Paul was reorganizing his mind to correct for all his misconceptions, and struggling to think of how he could correct for all the damage he had done. For remember, the text says that Paul ravaged the church, severely persecuting both men and women. He was also praying, as the next passage in Acts says. And as a righteous man of God, that is what we would expect him to be doing.

Remember Paul’s own words: **“Indeed therefore I thought it necessary for myself to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which also I did at Jerusalem. And I locked up many of the sanctified in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were killed, I gave a vote against them. And punishing them often at all the synagogues, I compelled them to blaspheme. And being extraordinarily furious toward them, I persecuted them even as far as to outside cities”** (Acts 26:9-11).

Being a very righteous man, the memory of how he had imprisoned the people of God, compelled them to blaspheme, and even voted to have them killed, must have tormented his soul terribly. There is no wonder why he did not eat or drink for those three days. How could any righteous man enjoy eating and drinking if he knew that he had helped cause other righteous souls to be imprisoned, to blaspheme, and to be killed?

Paul may have appeared idle in his blindness for those three days. But I have no doubt that his mind and his thoughts were working vigorously within him. Not only was he struggling with the memories of his persecutions, but he had to rethink entirely his conceptions about Christ and his church.

Jesus no doubt knew how tormented Paul would become when he learned what he had been doing. Therefore, in his compassion Jesus told him at the same time that he was going to use him in his service. For remember, in the vision Jesus had said he was going to use Paul to open the eyes of the people, both Jews and Gentiles, **“to turn about from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, for them to receive remission of sins and a lot among those who have been sanctified”** by faith in Christ. And that

must have given Paul much encouragement to help counter the pain of his guilt feelings, knowing that he was not condemned, but could still work for God.

The Lord sends Ananias to Paul

- **Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus, named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold me, Lord. And the Lord said to him, After rising, go into the street called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas, a man named Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And he saw in a vision a man named Ananias who came in and laid a hand on him, so that he might receive sight (Acts 9:10-12).**

Paul was a very zealous man for God, and the shock of learning that he had been fighting against God compelled him to pray about it. What righteous man would not be praying if he learned he had been opposing God in such a way? God is our heavenly Father, and for righteous men when we pray to him it is like speaking to a beloved earthly father. We can pour out our souls to God, knowing that he is not only a stern disciplinarian but he is also merciful and compassionate.

Remember, Jesus had struck Paul with blindness, which is a very severe blow against any man. And until his vision of Ananias Paul did not know how long he would be blinded. Remember, when sighted persons lose their vision it is a much more severe handicap than for those who are born blind. If you want proof of that, then blindfold your eyes for at least one day so you can experience what blindness is like.

The text does not say when during his three days of fasting that God gave him the vision about Ananias coming so he could receive his sight. However, if it was during the last day, then Paul had at least two days to agonize about the loss of his vision.

One principle about punishment is that it must last long enough to be effective. It is a great mistake when parents stop punishing to comfort the crying of their child. And even when the punishment is over they should not be too quick to comfort them. Let the punishment have its positive effect. Nevertheless, there is no substitute for good judgment in whatever we do.

Ananias fears Paul

- **But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how many evil things he did to thy sanctified at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name (Acts 9:13-14).**

Ananias was understandably surprised that the Lord would send him to Paul. And he was reluctant to go because Paul had probably been the most vicious of all their enemies. Paul's reputation was widely known among the disciples. And no doubt they all tried to avoid being persecuted by him. Remember, his persecution against them was severe.

Paul is a chosen vessel to the Lord

- **But the Lord said to him, Go, because this man is a chosen vessel to me, to bear my name before Gentiles and kings, and sons of Israel. For I will give him a glimpse of how many things it is necessary for him to suffer for my name (Acts 9:15-16).**

The Lord knew what kind of spirit Paul had. He knew that Paul was both well qualified and zealous to serve him. And history has proven that Paul was one of the most fruitful men for the cause of Christ. As God had chosen Peter and the other apostles to spread the good news of Christ to the Jews, so he chose Paul to spread the good news of Christ to the Gentiles.

Paul would bear his name to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the sons of Israel. For Paul was not restricted to the Gentiles only. However, his primary role was with the Gentiles, as he said in his letter to the Galatians: **“... I was entrusted with the good news for men of uncircumcision, as Peter for men of circumcision (for he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles) ...”** (Galatians 2:7-8).

Notice how the Lord also said he was going to give Paul **“a glimpse of how many things it is necessary for him to suffer for my name.”** Suffering for the cause of Christ is required of every disciple. For the book of Acts says farther on that it is **“necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22).

And those who were chosen to be the most active in promoting the good news of Christ suffered the most. For Paul later said to the Corinthians, **“For I think God has exhibited us the apostles least, as men sentenced to die, because we became a spectacle to the world, both to agents and to men. We are foolish for the sake of Christ, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are esteemed, but we are disreputable.”**

“As far as the present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are ill clothed, and are treated roughly, and are homeless. And we toil, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being slandered, we entreat. We became as trash of the world, an offscouring of all things, until now” (First Corinthians 4:9-13).

Unlike the popular image of the apostles, they were not arrayed in fancy robes and given the best treatment. Nor were they esteemed outside the limits of the church. Indeed, they were considered **“trash of the world, an offscouring of all things.”** Therefore remember, if you want to be faithful to Christ and his good news, you are going to be hated by the world.

Paul was later given many revelations and the power to perform many mighty signs and miracles. But he was also subject to severe persecution by the enemies of the church. He indeed suffered many things for the name of Christ. Yet he always remained faithful, and full of love for his Lord and Savior.

Paul was immersed

- **And Ananias departed and entered into the house. And having laid hands on him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord, he who appeared to thee on the road on which thou came, has sent me so that thou may receive sight, and be filled of the Holy Spirit. And straightaway there fell from his eyes, like scales, and he looked up. And immediately after rising up, he was immersed. And having received nourishment, he was strengthened (Acts 9:17-19).**

Notice the first thing that Paul did after he received his sight back, even before he ate anything: he was immersed. The above report does not mention him being commanded to immerse. However, when Paul was defending himself before the mob who cast him out of the temple, he told more details about what Ananias said to him. That information included the command to immerse for the remission of his sins: **“And a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report by all the Jews who dwell there, having come near me, and having stood by, he said to me, Brother Saul, look up. And I looked up on him the same hour.**

“And he said, The God of our fathers appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous Man, and to hear a voice from his mouth, because thou wilt be a witness for him to all men of the things that thou have seen and heard. And now what is it going to be? Having arisen, immerse and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:12-16).

Ananias told Paul the same thing that Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Peter told them, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).** Paul had already repented. All he needed next was to immerse for the remission of his sins (washing away his sins). After that he was filled of the Holy Spirit receiving its gift. It was only then that Paul received nourishment and his body was strengthened.

Paul preaches Christ

- **And Saul became with the disciples in Damascus some days. And straightaway he proclaimed the Christ in the synagogues, that this man is the Son of God.**
- **And all those who heard were amazed, and said, Is this not the man who destroyed those in Jerusalem who call on this name? And he has come here for this, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests. But Saul was strengthened more, and was confounding the Jews who dwell at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ (Acts 9:19-22).**

The shock of what Paul had discovered about himself did not cause him to quit working to promote God and his ways. He was just as zealous to promote Jesus Christ as he had been to fight against him. Let not personal failures defeat you. As Paul later said to his brothers at Rome, **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good” (Romans 12:21).**

Paul was not overcome by his terrible feelings of guilt, nor was he so proud that he refused to accept how wrong he had been. If anything, he used his feelings of guilt to motivate him to work even harder. For he said to the Corinthians, **“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And his grace for me did not become empty, but I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me”** (First Corinthians 15:9-10). Paul was also a very humble man, giving God the credit for his abundant labor.

Because Paul was such a very well-educated man he was able to argue very effectively to prove that Jesus is the Christ. He was so effective that he confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus. But they were not of the same spirit Paul was, because they refused to admit they had been wrong and to accept the truth about Jesus.

The Jews plot to destroy him

- **And after considerable days were fulfilled, the Jews plotted to destroy him, but their plot was known to Saul. And they watched the gates both day and night so that they might destroy him. But the disciples, after taking him by night, let him down through the wall, having lowered him in a hamper** (Acts 9:23-25).

How many days those were is not told. Such things were obviously considered unimportant to the Holy Spirit that guided the hand of Luke who wrote this book. And I see no reason to conjecture about it. Those days were long enough for Paul to defeat the Jews with knowledge and reason. Consequently, the Jews resorted to what all sinful men do when they cannot win with reason. They resorted to plotting violence against him.

However, such plots are rarely kept secret, and so Paul learned about it. The Jews thought they had him trapped, because they watched the gates both day and night. But Paul was rescued by the disciples, sending him away from the city by night, having lowered him down through the wall.

It would have been very foolish for Paul to have given himself up to them. There have been men who actually sought to be martyred and gave themselves over to be destroyed. A famous example of that is Ignatius, one of what men call the ante-Nicene fathers or the early church fathers. They ought to be called patriarchs, because Jesus commanded against designating men to be our fathers. Remember, he said, **“And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your Father, he in the heavens”** (Matthew 23:9).

The only example we have in the Bible of surrendering to be destroyed is the Lord Jesus Christ. And he only gave himself up because it was the only way he could redeem us from the condemnation caused by our sins. No other man could have ever done that. Every other time Jesus was threatened he escaped from his enemies. I speak much more about the necessity of his crucifixion in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. It is very foolish to surrender to those who seek to destroy us. We can serve God much better alive than dead.

Paul goes to Jerusalem

- **And when Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to join with the disciples, and they all feared him, not believing that he is a disciple. But Barnabas having taken him, he brought him to the apostles. And he related to them how he saw the Lord on the road, and that he spoke to him, and how he spoke boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:26-27).**

In Jerusalem the news about Paul's conversion and how zealous he had been in Damascus, preaching the good news of Christ, had apparently not been received. Or at least it was not widely believed, because when he went there they all feared him. However, Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles, where he explained all that happened to him. Barnabas even told the disciples how Jesus appeared to Paul and spoke to him. And how Paul spoke boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus, instead of against him.

Only Paul experienced that vision, but Barnabas accepted Paul's testimony about it. Even those who were with Paul when he had the vision, did not know the vision was from Jesus, nor did they know he spoke to him. Nevertheless, the way Paul changed, and became active in promoting faith in the Lord persuaded Barnabas that what Paul said about the Lord appearing to him and speaking to him was true. For the change in Paul was astonishing to all who knew him before.

Paul preaches in Jerusalem

- **And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:28).**

Paul was as active in Jerusalem proclaiming the good news of Christ as he was in Damascus. Paul was not timid in his efforts to promote the name of the Lord Jesus. He spoke boldly, even though he knew there were many enemies of Christ there. Remember how they stoned Stephen.

What is meant by Paul coming in and going out probably refers to his work both within the assemblies of the congregations and outside of them among the population of Jerusalem. Remember, Paul had received knowledge from the revelations given him by the Lord himself. That meant Paul had much to teach the disciples as well as the unbelievers.

The Hellenists attempt to destroy him

- **And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to destroy him. But when the brothers knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him away to Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30).**

Hellenists were Jews who spoke Greek and attempted to live like Greeks. Many Jews who lived in foreign countries were Hellenists, just as many Jews in America are Americans in their way of life. The above passage says that the Hellenists attempted to destroy Paul. Remember it was Jews from the synagogue of the Libertines together with Jews from for-

eign countries who opposed Stephen and caused his death. And now Jews from foreign countries were attempting to destroy Paul.

However, all such plots against the disciples could not be kept secret. Therefore, as in Damascus, the brothers helped him escape from them. Tarsus was the birthplace of Paul, as he said to the chief captain of the Romans who arrested him many years later when a mob of Jews cast him out of the temple and tried to kill him: **“I am really a Jewish man of Tarsus of Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city”** (Acts 21:39). Cilicia was in Asia Minor, part of what is now the country of Turkey. Tarsus was in the southeastern portion near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The congregations multiply

- **Indeed therefore the congregations throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified. And, going in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied** (Acts 9:31).

Paul was apparently one of the last who were actively persecuting the church. And when he was converted by the Lord I suspect he was very successful in combating that persecution. Paul probably discouraged most of the Jews from continuing their opposition. It was probably the last and most vicious of the Jews who tried to destroy him. And with Paul out of the country even they apparently stopped the persecutions.

Nevertheless, regardless of how it may have happened, the congregations throughout the land of Israel had peace. Throughout history persecution against the church has cycled from little to much. In America we are now going from little to much persecution.

Peter heals a paralyzed man

- **And it came to pass, Peter, passing through all parts, to also come down to the sanctified who dwell at Lydda. And he found there a certain man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed, laying on a bed for eight years. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals thee. Arise and make thy bed. And straightaway he arose. And all those dwelling at Lydda and Sharon who saw him, turned to the Lord** (Acts 9:32-35).

Although the apostles were based at Jerusalem they must have ventured out to evangelize elsewhere in Israel. Remember, Peter and John went to the Samaritan city after Philip was successful converting the people there.

Lydda was not far from Jerusalem. It was only thirty miles northwest about two-thirds of the way to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Sharon was the name of the territory along the coast, from a little south of Joppa to a little north of Caesarea. It was called the plain of Sharon.

Remember the story of how Peter healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (see Acts 3:2-6). That man had been lame from birth. The man at Lydda had been lame for eight years. Being lame that long causes the muscles of the legs to develop terminal or

irreversible atrophy, which means the muscles shrink and disappear. Hence, immediate cures of paralysis are obviously miracles, which only God can create.

The population who knew the paralyzed man and saw it happen realized that healing was from God. Consequently, they turned to the Lord. Remember, that was the primary reason for the power of miracles before the New Testament record was available. And that is why miracles no longer happen. Be not deceived.

The disciples send for Peter

- **Now at Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, being translated, is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charities that she did. And in those days, having been ill, she happened to die. And after washing her, they laid her in an upper chamber. And since Lydda is near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter is in it, they sent two men to him, exhorting him not to delay to go through to them (Acts 9:36-38).**

Joppa was a seaport city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea about thirty-five miles from Jerusalem. Lydda was about ten miles on the road from Joppa to Jerusalem. Tabitha is a Syrian name, while Dorcas is a Greek name, and they both mean antelope or gazelle. Tabitha was a fruitful disciple of Christ, full of good works and charities. On the great day of judgment we are all going to be judged by our works (see Revelation 20:12-13). And that is how Tabitha was judged by the other disciples.

Tabitha may have needed washing because of her illness. Nevertheless, they laid her clean body in an upper chamber. They also sent two men to bring Peter quickly. The disciples knew of the power to heal that God had given Peter, and they loved Tabitha too much not to make an effort to bring her back to life.

Dying in the Lord is a great blessing, because of our hope of eternal life with him in heaven. Nevertheless, dying is a great loss to the loved ones who remain alive in the world. God knows that, and he is sympathetic toward our feelings of grief. Remember how Jesus wept when he saw how the people were grieving over the death of Lazarus (see John 11:33-35). It is good and right to grieve when our loved ones perish. It is a bitter loss for us when it happens, even though we know of our glories in the afterlife.

Peter brings Dorcas back to life

- **And after rising, Peter went with them, whom, after coming, they brought into the upper chamber. And all the widows stood by him weeping, and exhibiting the coats and garments, as many things as Dorcas made being with them.**
- **But Peter, having sent them all out, having knelt down, he prayed. And having turned to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And the woman opened her eyes. And when she saw Peter, she sat up. And having given her a hand, he raised her up. And after calling the sanctified and the widows, he**

presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa, and many believed in the Lord (Acts 9:39-42).

Being so near Joppa, Peter probably came the same day that Tabitha died. Tabitha must have been very skilled, making quality garments, in order for those widows to want to display them. Tabitha was obviously much loved by the widows there. The record does not say that Tabitha was a widow, nor does it tell how old she was when Peter raised her from the dead. Regardless of her age, however, most of the good works and charities she did may have been for the widows, because they were the ones showing the things Tabitha had made. Remember, widows and orphans were considered the most deprived of those not physically impaired.

Some have suggested that the garments made by Tabitha that the widows displayed were actually being worn by the widows; perhaps at least some of them.

The record does not mention Peter raising anyone from the dead before he came to Tabitha. Therefore, he knelt and prayed before trying. Remember, Peter simply said to the paralyzed man at the temple, **“In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk”** (Acts 3:6).

Jesus had performed a similar miracle by raising to life the young son of a widow, her only son. Here is that story: **“And it came to pass on the next day that he went to a city called Nain, and a considerable number of his disciples went with him, also a large multitude. Now when he came near to the gate of the city, behold, an only begotten son who died was being carried out for his mother. And she was a widow, and a considerable crowd of the city was with her.**

“And when the Lord saw her, he felt compassion toward her, and said to her, Weep not. And having come, he touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stood still. And he said, Young man, I say to thee, arise. And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. And fear seized all. And they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has been raised among us, and, God came to help his people. And this report about him went forth in the whole of Judea, and in all the region around” (Luke 7:11-17).

God heard Peter’s prayer and raised Tabitha back to life. And the news of that miracle spread throughout the whole of Joppa, so that many believed in the Lord. They believed in the Lord because Peter and the other disciples always gave the Lord due credit.

An agent appears to Cornelius

- **And it came to pass for him to remain considerable days at Joppa with a certain Simon, a tanner. Now a certain man was in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called Italian, a devout man, and fearing God with all his house, and doing many charities for the people, and beseeching God always. He saw plainly in a vision about the ninth hour of the day, an agent of God coming in to him, and saying to him, Cornelius.**
- **And after gazing at him, and having become afraid, he said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Thy prayers and thy charities have come up for**

a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. This man lodges with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is beside the seaside (Acts 9:43-10:1-6).

Cornelius was not only a centurion, but he was also a Gentile. Until this time the kingdom of God was not preached to the Gentiles, neither by Christ himself nor by his disciples after his ascension into heaven. Indeed, Jesus commanded against it while he was still with them on the earth. Remember what he said to his apostles when he sent them out to preach and to heal: **“Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And while going, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens has come near”** (Matthew 10:5-7). Jesus had preached to some of the Samaritans, but never to the Gentiles.

The text says that Cornelius was **“a devout man, and fearing God with all his house, and doing many charities for the people, and beseeching God always.”** Righteous men can be found in almost every land. Notice the four virtues listed about Cornelius: (1) he was a devout man, (2) he feared God with all his house, (3) he did many charities for the people, and (4) he besought God always. Although the text does not say, Cornelius was probably a proselyte of the Jews, because he was a believer in the true and living God, the God of Israel, and not a polytheist as were most other Gentiles.

Remember, the ninth hour was what we call 3 PM. Cornelius was probably praying in private when the agent of God appeared to him in the vision. The first thing the agent did was praise him for his prayers and charities, and inform him that they had **“come up for a memorial before God.”** A memorial is recognition of meritorious service.

God values our prayers and charities. Our prayers alone, however, are not valued without having good works as well. In fact, the prayers of unrepentant sinners are offensive to him. For Solomon said, **“He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination”** (Proverbs 28:9).

After complimenting Cornelius, the agent commanded him to send men to summon Peter. The text does not say that the agent gave Cornelius the reason why. When Cornelius told Peter about his vision and the command to summon Peter, all Cornelius added was that the agent said Peter would speak to him (see Acts 10:32).

God uses us to teach each other about him and his will for us. In the past God chose prophets to proclaim his will. However, he no longer uses prophets inspired by his Holy Spirit to speak to us. We now have the Bible, which is the record we have of what God revealed to his prophets. Therefore, God now speaks to us through the words of his Bible. And that is what we now use to teach about him and his will for us.

Peter and the other apostles were needed to proclaim God’s will because the New Testament had not yet been written. That is one reason why the agent from God commanded Cornelius to summon Peter to speak to him. The other reason is because Peter was given the keys of the kingdom (see Matthew 16:19), and it was now time for him to open the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles.

Cornelius sends for Peter

- **And when the agent speaking to Cornelius departed, having called two of his housemen, and a devout soldier of those who personally served him, and after reporting all things to them, he sent them to Joppa (Acts 10:7-8).**

The agent commanded Cornelius to send men, but he did not say how many. Cornelius sent two men plus a devout soldier to go with them. He may have sent the soldier to provide security to ensure that Peter would be escorted safely to him. Notice that Cornelius sent a *devout* soldier, which probably means he was also a faithful proselyte. The things they were to report to Peter included the visit of the heavenly agent and his command to summon Peter.

Peter has a vision

- **Now on the morrow, while those men were traveling and approaching the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry and wanted to eat. But while those men prepared, a trance fell upon him.**
- **And he sees heaven opened, and a certain container descending to him, like a great sheet bound at four corners, and being lowered to the earth, in which were all the four-footed things of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the sky. And a voice came to him, After rising, Peter, kill and eat (Acts 10:9-13).**

The men sent by Cornelius did not depart until the next day. Remember, the agent did not appear to him until 3 PM. And Joppa is about thirty-five miles south of Caesarea where Cornelius was. That means it would have taken about nine or ten hours to travel that far.

Peter was on the housetop to pray. Housetops in that arid region commonly had flat roofs which people often used for various purposes. Peter went on the housetop about noon to pray. He probably went there because it would give him some privacy. After praying he apparently asked the men in the house to prepare him something to eat. It was while they were preparing the meal for him that he had his trance.

His trance was probably like a very vivid dream. For what he saw was no doubt a vision in his mind, and not a real sheet containing all of those animals. Along with the vision a voice commanded Peter to rise, kill and eat.

God gave us animals to use for our purposes, including to eat for nourishment. When the Bible describes the Creation, one of the passages says, **“And God said, Let us make mankind in our image—after our likeness—and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:26). Another passage says, **“And out of the ground Jehovah God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food ...”** (Genesis 2:9).

That means at the beginning God created vegetation for man to eat. However, after the great flood God allowed us to eat flesh as well. For the God said to Noah and his sons, **“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the heavens, with all with which the ground teems, and all the fishes of the sea. They are delivered into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. As the green herb, I have given you all. But flesh with the life of it, *which is the blood of it*, ye shall not eat”** (Genesis 9:2-4).

What God has cleansed

- **But Peter said, Not so, Lord, because I have never eaten anything profane or unclean. And a voice again for a second time, What God has cleansed, thou shall not make profane. And this happened thrice, and again the vessel was taken up into heaven** (Acts 10:14-16).

Part of the law of Moses contained ordinances about the kinds of animals the sons of Israel could eat and the kinds they could not eat (see Leviticus 11). The animals they were forbidden to eat were called unclean. And apparently the sheet that Peter saw contained only unclean animals. Otherwise, he could have selected the clean ones. Therefore, Peter protested, saying he had never eaten anything profane or unclean. However, the voice told him that what God cleansed he should not make profane.

That identical vision with the voice happened three times to Peter. In the Bible three times is often used for emphasis. Consider this example from the book of Isaiah: **“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isaiah 6:1-3).

Also consider this one from the book of Revelation: **“And I looked, and I heard one eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying in a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth from the remaining sounds of the trumpet of the three agents who are going to sound”** (Revelation 8:13).

The men from Cornelius arrive

- **Now while Peter was bewildered in himself whatever the vision which he saw might be, that lo, the men who were sent from Cornelius, having inquired the house of Simon, stood at the gate. And after calling out they asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, lodges here. And while Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, men seek thee. But after rising, go down, and go with them, doubting nothing, because I have sent them** (Acts 10:17-20).

That vision was a symbolic lesson that God gave Peter, but he would not understand it until he had met with Cornelius. Good lessons do not necessarily need to be understood immediately. Sometimes they are more effective after some other events. And that was the

case with Peter's vision. Another such example were the two dreams that Joseph the son of Jacob had. Those dreams prophesied how Jacob and his family would become subservient to Joseph. Those dreams were not understood until the prophesies were fulfilled years later when Joseph was made ruler of Egypt, subject only to the Pharaoh. See Genesis 37-50 for that story.

Besides the command to not make profane what God had cleansed, the only other commands that the Spirit of God gave Peter were to go with the men who summoned him, and doubt nothing, because he had sent them. The Spirit of God said that he sent those men. Yet God did not directly send them. He sent an agent to command Cornelius to send men for Peter. Cornelius then selected those particular men and gave them the command to summon Peter. That is just another example of the need to carefully interpret things that the Bible says.

The men sent by Cornelius must have departed very early that morning to have arrived so early in the afternoon. Or perhaps they came on horses, which would have been quicker. They may have even come in a chariot (or chariots), since Cornelius was a Centurion.

The men report to Peter

- **And having gone down to the men, Peter said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek. What is the cause for which ye are here? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man, and fearing God, and being well testified by the whole nation of the Jews, was divinely warned by a holy agent to summon thee to his house, and to hear sayings from thee (Acts 10:21-23).**

What those men said about Cornelius is further evidence that he was a proselyte. For the Jews hated all other Gentiles. They even passed a law against any Jew fraternizing with a Gentile. Yet Cornelius was **“well testified by the whole nation of the Jews”**

Notice how the men said that the holy agent warned Cornelius to summon Peter and hear sayings from him. The only other time in the New Testament that an agent from God warned a man was with Joseph, the husband of Mary. The first time was when he commanded him to take the child Jesus and his mother to Egypt to escape Herod. The second time was when Joseph was returning from Egypt. The agent warned him that Herod's son was reigning in Judea. Joseph then went directly to Galilee.

What those men reported indicates that the command for Cornelius to summon Peter and hear him was a warning. It was a warning because a failure to obey that command would have serious adverse consequences, although what those consequences would be were not told. Every command of God is also a warning. For disobedience has serious adverse consequences. People rarely think of commands from God as warnings. Yet the Bible is full of evidence that they are.

When God commanded Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit, he warned him of the consequences of disobedience. When God gave the sons of Israel their laws and ordinances, he warned them of the consequences of disobedience. He gave his people many warnings against disobedience. His most detailed warnings were very lengthy descriptions of the many curses that would fall upon them if they did not obey his laws.

And he gave those detailed warnings to them twice. The first time was with the generation that came out of Egypt and heard the law at mount Sinai (see Leviticus 26:14-43). The second time was with the next generation after that first generation perished in the forty years of wandering in the wilderness (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68). That first generation perished because of the curse of their disobedience. Never forget: every command from God is also a warning.

Peter goes to Cornelius

- **So, having invited them in, he lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went forth with them, and certain of the brothers from Joppa went with him. And on the morrow they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his kinsmen and close friends (Acts 10:23-24).**

Those men from Cornelius had traveled many hours to arrive at Joppa. And even if they had used horses, those beasts would have needed feeding and resting. Therefore, Peter lodged them until the morrow. Peter did not delay obeying the Holy Spirit who commanded him to go with those men. However, God wants us to use good judgment when we obey his commands. And it was good judgment for Peter to delay until the morrow before beginning the journey.

Notice how Peter brought some of his Christian brothers with him. That was not commanded by the Holy Spirit either. However, taking other faithful men with him was a prudent thing for him to do, and it also indicates his use of good judgment in his obedience to the command to go.

The kinsmen and friends of Cornelius were waiting with him. He had no doubt informed them about his encounter with the heavenly agent. Moreover, a later passage gives more information about what the agent said to Cornelius, namely that Peter would **“speak sayings to thee, by which thou wilt be saved, thou and all thy house”** (Acts 11:14). Hence, he gathered together all his house, as well as his kinsmen and his close friends to hear what Peter was going to say. Cornelius also knew that the men he sent would be returning with Peter that day, and he wanted them all there for him.

What happened later indicates that the kinsmen and close friends Cornelius had gathered with him were those who wanted to hear Peter’s words by which they could be saved. The sons of Israel had been God’s chosen people, but he is still the God of all people. And throughout history there have been many Gentiles who were as worthy and even more worthy than the sons of Israel to be accepted by God.

From the time of Abraham, their founding father, God planned for the Hebrews to be for him **“a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”** (Exodus 19:6). He wanted to use them to preserve righteousness and spread it throughout the world. And in spite of their failure to be that kind of nation, righteous men among them did write the holy Bible so that righteousness could be preserved and spread throughout the world.

Cornelius fell down before Peter

- **And when it came about for Peter to enter, Cornelius, having met him, after falling down at his feet, worshiped. But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up. I am also myself a man. And as he conversed with him, he went in and found many who came together (Acts 10:25-27).**

Notice what a humble man Cornelius was. He was a centurion of the Roman army in command of many men. Yet he humbled himself before Peter, even falling down at his feet to worship him. But Peter would not allow him. Peter too was a humble man, and he admitted being only a man. And that is how we should all be toward each other.

Regarding the matter of bowing or kneeling before other men, there is nothing wrong with it when it is appropriate. However, we should never fall down to worship anyone but God. Even the angels in heaven would not allow a man to fall down in worship before them. Here is an example from the story of John's great vision of heaven: **"And I am John, the man hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the agent showing me these things. And he says to me, See thou not. I am thy fellow bondman, and of thy brothers the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"** (Revelation 22:8-9).

Peter conversed with Cornelius as they went in to the gathering. What they said to each other then is not recorded. However, it was not about the reason for the visit, because Cornelius did not explain that until they were with the others. What they said together when they first met is insignificant. The Bible records the things we need to know, and omits trivial details. Sometimes details are given, but not without a purpose. And it is sometimes necessary for us to discover the purpose or purposes of such things when they are not apparent to us. The Bible is the word of God for us, and he does nothing without reason.

Peter tells why he came

- **And he said to them, Ye understand how it is unlawful for a Jewish man to fraternize or to visit with a foreign man, and yet God demonstrated to me not to call one man profane or unclean. And so I came without objection when summoned. I ask therefore for what matter ye summoned me (Acts 10:28-29).**

That law against fraternizing or even visiting with a foreign man was never a part of the law of Moses. It was never commanded by God. It was a foolish law created by the arrogance of Jews. God hates arrogance, for the psalm says, **"O Jehovah, in the morning thou shall hear my voice. In the morning I will direct to thee, and will keep watch. For thou are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil shall not sojourn with thee. The arrogant shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hate all workers of iniquity"** (Psalm 5:3-5).

Peter's question shows that he had not been told why he was summoned. The Holy Spirit had prepared Peter for that meeting with his vision of the sheet coming down from heaven, and by sending men to summon him. Therefore, in obedience to God, Peter violated that law of the Jews by visiting with Cornelius. However, he had not been told the reason for

the meeting. He did not yet know that God was preparing for the Gentiles to be allowed in the kingdom of God, the church, although that thought may have come into his mind before the meeting.

Peter said he came without objection. Remember, he had objected to killing and eating the unclean animals. However, when God commanded him not to make profane what God had cleansed, Peter obeyed. Therefore, he went with the men without objection. Unlike the stubborn Jews who rejected Jesus, Peter obeyed God regardless of what he had been taught in the past. And every man should obey the teachings of God from his holy book the Bible, regardless of what he has been taught in the past. Remember, unless we have that childlike humbleness, open-mindedness, and willingness to learn, we will never enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

Cornelius tells about the agent

- **And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and the ninth hour praying in my house. And behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel. And he says, Cornelius, thy prayer was heard, and thy charities are remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa, and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. This man lodges in the house of Simon, a tanner, beside the sea, who, after coming, will speak to thee** (Acts 10:30-33).

Here is the original report about Cornelius' encounter with the agent of God. **"He saw plainly in a vision about the ninth hour of the day, an agent of God coming in to him, and saying to him, Cornelius. And after gazing at him, and having become afraid, he said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Thy prayers and thy charities have come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. This man lodges with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is beside the seaside"** (Acts 10:3-6).

Notice first that the original report said Cornelius saw an agent of God coming in to him. When Cornelius reported the incident to Peter, he said he saw a man in bright apparel standing before him. Every heavenly agent described in the Bible had the appearance of a man, never a woman.

In the Bible, bright, shining, and white apparel is always associated with holiness. For example, here is part of what Jesus said to John in his great vision: **"But thou have a few names in Sardis who did not defile their garments. And they will walk with me in white, because they are worthy. He who overcomes, this man will be clothed in white garments, and I will, no, not erase his name out of the book of life. And I will acknowledge his name before my Father, and before his agents. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations"** (Revelation 3:4-6).

The only new information Cornelius' gave about what the agent told him was that Peter, **"after coming, will speak to thee."** Remember the original report said nothing about what Peter would do when he came. Remember also that the men Cornelius had sent to Peter said the holy agent commanded Cornelius to summon him **"to hear sayings from thee."** And when Peter later reported to the other apostles and the brothers at Jerusalem

about his meeting with Cornelius, he told how the heavenly agent commanded Cornelius to send for Peter who would **“speak sayings to thee, by which thou will be saved, thou and all thy house”** (Acts 11:14).

Each report added a little more information for us about what happened. That is typical of the Bible record.

God is not partial

- **Immediately therefore I sent to thee, and thou did well having come. Now therefore we are all present in the sight of God, to hear all the things commanded thee by God. And having opened his mouth, Peter said, In truth, I am overwhelmed that God is not partial, but in every nation, he who fears him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to him** (Acts 10:33-35).

Cornelius, his household, his kinsmen, and his close friends, were all eager to hear Peter speak the commands of God for them. They had the childlike spirit required for entrance into the kingdom of God. They were humble, open-minded, and eager to learn. Remember, Jesus said to his disciples, **“Truly I say to you, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a child, he will, no, not enter it”** (Mark 10:15).

Peter then said he was overwhelmed, because all of his life he had been taught that the sons of Israel (including their proselytes) were God’s chosen people and not any of the Gentiles. Indeed, Jesus himself told the Gentile mother who besought him to heal her daughter, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). And when Jesus sent his apostles out to teach and to heal, he forbade them from going to the Gentiles.

Jesus had also forbade them from going to the Samaritans, but he made some exceptions to that. Remember, he had preached to the people from the Samaritan city of the woman at the well (see John 4). Also remember what that woman said to Jesus before the people came out to see him: **“I know that Messiah comes, he who is called Christ. When that man comes he will declare all things to us”** (John 4:25). Therefore, Philip felt justified to preach the good news of Christ to the Samaritans. Peter and John also came to lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

However, none of the apostles had ever preached to the Gentiles. There was just too much deep seated prejudice against them. Remember, they even made laws against Jews visiting with Gentiles. Therefore, Peter was overwhelmed when he learned that God was not partial, and he accepts men from every nation who fear him and work righteousness. The Gentile proselytes were apparently men who came to the synagogues and chose to join the Jews by becoming circumcised and obey their laws.

And I rejoice greatly because I too am a Gentile by race, although spiritually I am a son of Abraham. I am a spiritual son of Abraham because like Abraham I believe in God and trust him. Paul wrote about that when he was contrasting the law of Moses with the good news of Christ. Among the things he said was, **“Because of this it is from faith, so that it is according to grace, in order for the promise to be sure to all the seed, not only to the seed from the law, but also to the seed from the faith of Abraham, who is father**

of us all” (Romans 4:16). When Paul said that Abraham is the father of us all, he meant all who believe in God and his Son Jesus Christ.

Notice the qualifications that Peter gave about being acceptable to God: fearing him and working righteousness. No man can be acceptable to God, whether he is a descendent of Israel or a Gentile, if he does not fear him and work righteousness.

Peter preaches Jesus Christ

- **The word that he sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching good news, peace by Jesus Christ (this man is Lord of all), ye know, the word having occurred throughout the whole of Judea beginning from Galilee after the immersion that John preached—Jesus of Nazareth—how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who passed through doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him** (Acts 10:36-38).

Peter immediately began to preach the good news of Christ to them. Cornelius had heard about Jesus. However, since there were many false rumors about him, then Peter first tells how Jesus was supported by God, and he did many good works throughout Judea beginning from Galilee. Cornelius probably knew of John the immerser as well, and Peter mentioned how the good news of Christ followed the work of John. Remember, John came to prepare the way for Christ.

The good that Jesus did included things like feeding the thousands who followed him. Notice how Peter said that Jesus healed all those who were oppressed by the devil; healing all those who came to him. Those oppressed by the devil were no doubt all who were handicapped or sick or who were possessed by evil spirits, because Peter said that Jesus healed them.

Since the devil oppresses people with those things, then everybody who combats those things is combating the devil, whether they believe in Christ or not. Remember how Jesus was accused of using the power of Beelzebub (another name for the devil) to cast out demons. Jesus showed how ridiculous that accusation was, because he was really combating the devil when he cast demons out (see Matthew 12:24).

God allows the devil to do many evil things, including oppress us in those ways. God is tolerating the sins of men also. And those sins also have harmful consequences. God is tolerating some evil in the world because he is testing the worthiness of our spirits for eternal sonship with him. He is harvesting souls for heaven, separating the wheat from the chaff (see Matthew 3:12).

God is tolerating rebellion against him by the devil and by men now. But remember, when this world is over the devil is going to be cast into the lake of fire, which burns forever. And that will also happen to every unrepentant sinner.

Peter says they were witnesses

- **And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem, whom also they killed, having hung on a tree. This man God raised up the third day, and granted him to become manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were previously chosen by God, to us, who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead (Acts 10:39-41).**

Peter then testified of Jesus' resurrection after he had been crucified. There is no more powerful proof that Jesus was truly the Son of God than his resurrection from the dead. Remember, Jesus had resurrected Lazarus four days after he had died. However, after Jesus died he was locked in a tomb that was guarded by men sent by the rulers of the Jews. And no man ever attempted to resurrect him. Jesus was resurrected by God himself, without using anybody else. What more proof could be used to prove that Jesus was the Son of God? It is more than enough proof for those who accept the truth of the testimony of those who witnessed his resurrection.

Notice how Peter said that the resurrected Jesus was not manifested to all the people. Jesus did not manifest himself to all of the people, because God wanted them to accept the testimony of the disciples of Christ. For that is required of us all.

It is impossible for Jesus to manifest himself to every man in every generation without continuing to make some kind of spectacular and miraculous appearance. He will not do that until the end of the world. For remember what he said about that: **“For as the lightning comes out from the east, and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of man”** (Matthew 24:27).

Therefore, we must accept the testimony of the witnesses if we are going to learn the truth about him. And that testimony has been recorded in the words of the New Testament. Dear reader, most of the knowledge we have comes from the testimony of others, either by word of mouth or from the written page. Only a fool would reject every kind of testimony. Such a man would remain exceedingly ignorant, if he could survive at all.

Wise men only reject false testimony. And making the right judgments about testimony is part of becoming wise. Therefore, read the Bible for yourself, and judge whether it is true or false testimony. Your eternal soul depends upon the choice you make.

What Jesus commanded them

- **And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to solemnly testify that this is the man designated by God, judge of the living and the dead. To this man all the prophets testify, that every man who believes in him, to receive remission of sins through his name (Acts 10:39-43).**

Peter first told them how God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, and that he went throughout Judea doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Peter then told how Jesus was crucified, but God raised him up from the dead; and that they were personal witnesses of his resurrection. Peter then told how Jesus commanded them to preach and testify to the people.

Peter and the other witnesses were commanded to preach and to testify that Jesus was designated by God, judge of the living and the dead. Jesus was designated by God because he is the only begotten Son of God. And being the only begotten Son of God meant that Jesus was the only man who was able to defeat the devil, and redeem from condemnation all who believe in him. Jesus was able because of his spiritual and moral superiority, which he proved beyond dispute by his life of perfect obedience to God in this world full of trials and temptations.

Peter then told how all the prophets testify (through their words in the Bible) **“that every man who believes in him, to receive remission of sins through his name.”** It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that any man can receive remission of his sins. Otherwise, he will remain condemned because of them, and in the afterlife he will be cast into hell with the devil and the demons. Let not the world deceive you.

The Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles

- **While Peter still spoke these sayings, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. And the faithful men of circumcision were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because also on the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out. For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God (Acts 10:42-46).**

Peter’s introduction to the good news of Christ was brief and concise. And the Holy Spirit obviously saw that it was sufficient to persuade Cornelius and the others with him. Therefore, the Holy Spirit fell upon them and gave them the power to speak in tongues, meaning to speak with foreign languages they had never learned.

The purpose of Peter’s mission had apparently not been revealed to him. It was that demonstration of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles, the same way it had been poured out on the Jews, revealed the purpose of their meeting. It was to demonstrate that Gentiles were to be accepted into the church, as well as bring salvation to Cornelius and those with him. And that astonished the men of circumcision who had come with Peter. Apparently they had never even considered that possibility.

Regarding the expression “men of circumcision,” all Jews were required to be circumcised. Even Gentiles who committed themselves to the law of Moses were circumcised. That means that every Gentile who accepted the law of Moses became a proselyte and a man of circumcision. Hence, some of the faithful men of circumcision who came with Peter may have been proselytes.

Paul spoke about that distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, when he said, **“... I was entrusted with the good news for men of uncircumcision, as Peter for men of circumcision (he who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles) ...”** (Galatians 2:7-8). Notice how Paul indicated that men of uncircumcision were Gentiles.

A man born a Gentile, whether he had been circumcised or not, still meant he was a Gentile by race. And since Paul was the apostle for the Gentiles he preached to them, whether they were Jewish proselytes or not, whether they had been circumcised or not. For he often

converted Jewish proselytes in the synagogues located in Gentile countries. Indeed, those proselytes proved to be more receptive to the good news of Christ than were the Jews.

Hence, when you read the expression men of circumcision you must use the context to determine whether it is referring to Jews or to Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes.

The Gentiles are immersed

- **Then Peter answered, Can any man forbid the water for these not to be immersed, who have received the Holy Spirit as we also? And he commanded them to be immersed in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to remain some days (Acts 10:46-48).**

Notice how Peter immediately wanted those Gentile believers to be immersed. How can men who claim to be Christians teach that immersion for the remission of sins is unimportant and not required? Yet the vast number of people who claim to be Christians have never been immersed in water for the remission of their sins. Remember, the purpose of immersion in water is for those who believe and repent to have their sins remitted.

That is exactly what Peter commanded the Jews on the day of Pentecost when they believed. After Peter preached to them they asked what they should do. Peter replied, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Spirit we receive, when we are immersed in water for the remission of our sins, is membership in the kingdom of God, and having the Holy Spirit dwell in us.

And that gives us our unique relationship as sons of God with his Spirit residing within us. For sinners cannot receive the Holy Spirit. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17).

The helper, the Spirit of truth, is the Holy Spirit, and the world cannot receive it. That is the gift of the Holy Spirit we receive when we repent and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. Let no man dissuade you from obeying that simple command. For you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven if you refuse to obey it.

The record says that Cornelius and those with him asked Peter to remain some days. And I have no doubt Peter consented, because those new Christians had many things to learn. There is much more to living a Christian life than simply being converted into the church. For the good news of Christ is an entirely different way of life from that of the world. Remember, the rite of immersion for the remission of sins involves being begotten again, begotten in spirit for a new life, making us babes in Christ.

Peter is accused

- **Now the apostles and the brothers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to**

Jerusalem, the men of circumcision contended against him, saying, Thou went in to uncircumcised men, having also eaten with them (Acts 11:1-3).

The men of circumcision contended with Peter, because it was against the law for Jews to visit with Gentiles. Remember however, that was not a law of God, but a foolish law in Israel that was created by arrogant Jews. Nevertheless, that law was widely supported even by Christians. That passage probably refers to Christian men of circumcision in Jerusalem who were the most committed to the laws of the Jews. Otherwise the text would have said that all of the other apostles and brothers contended against Peter.

Peter tells about the vision

- **But when Peter began, he expounded to them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain container descending, as a great sheet being lowered from heaven by four corners, and it came as far as to me, having gazed at which, I was examining. And I saw the four footed things of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the sky.**
- **And I heard a voice saying to me, Having risen, Peter, kill and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord, because nothing profane or unclean has ever entered into my mouth. But a voice answered me for a second time out of heaven, What God has cleansed, thou shall not make profane. And this happened thrice, and all were drawn up again into heaven (Acts 11:4-10).**

Peter's response was to inform them of the vision he had at Joppa, a vision that included commands from heaven. For he was commanded (1) to arise, kill and eat, and, (2) not to make profane what God has cleansed. Telling the others about that vision immediately informed them that what Peter did was in obedience to commands from God.

Here is the original description of Peter's vision: **"Now on the morrow, while those men were traveling and approaching the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry and wanted to eat. But while those men prepared, a trance fell upon him. And he sees heaven opened, and a certain container descending to him, like a great sheet bound at four corners, and being lowered to the earth, in which were all the four-footed things of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the sky.**

"And a voice came to him, After rising, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord, because I have never eaten anything profane or unclean. And a voice again for a second time, What God has cleansed, thou shall not make profane. And this happened thrice, and again the vessel was taken up into heaven" (Acts 10:9-16).

Peter's description to the men in Jerusalem includes everything in the original, although some of the wording is a little different. For example, in the original report Peter's response said, **"Not so, Lord, because I have never eaten anything profane or unclean."** However, Peter's report said, **"Not so, Lord, because nothing profane or unclean has ever entered into my mouth."** The meaning is exactly the same, although a few of the words are different.

Remember, one lesson for us is that when studying the Bible we should look for the message in the words and not be distracted by the words themselves. Remember, most of the Bibles of the world are translations anyway. And the original Greek cannot be translated word for word. Indeed, there are some Greek words themselves have no exact equivalent in many other languages.

He tells how Cornelius sent for him

- **And behold, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, who were sent from Caesarea to me. And the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. And these six brothers also went with me, and we entered into the man's house. And he informed us how he saw the agent in his house, who stood and said to him, Send forth men to Joppa, and summon Simon, the man surnamed Peter, who will speak sayings to thee, by which thou will be saved, thou and all thy house (Acts 11:11-14).**

Before this time the record did not say how many men went with Peter to Caesarea. Peter plus those six men meant that seven men went to see Cornelius. Notice how the wording of the passage says “... **these six brothers also went with me** ...” That means those same six men came with Peter to Jerusalem. If they had not been there with him Peter would have simply said that six brothers went with him. He would not have added the pronoun “these.”

It was very wise for him to bring those witnesses with him to Jerusalem, because what happened was revolutionary to the church. It meant that the church was open to all men, to the entire world, and not just to the sons of Israel. And Peter no doubt knew that he would be challenged about accepting Gentiles.

The description of the agent's visit to Cornelius is recorded three times in the book of Acts. Besides describing the event itself, one of those descriptions was when Cornelius testified of it to Peter. The third testimony is here when Peter was testifying to the apostles and brothers in Judea. Peter told them how the agent who appeared to Cornelius said that Peter would speak things to him by which he would be saved, he and all his house. That part of the visit was not recorded in the first two descriptions.

That is just another example of how the Bible does not always include everything in its descriptions. Therefore, it is foolish to conclude that it does. God wrote the Bible much like he made the world. It is filled with many treasures that are easily seen, but many others must be searched out.

Also many parts of the Bible are like a picture puzzle where the separate pieces must be found and brought together. Jesus often quoted Bible passages for his lessons. And both Peter and Paul quoted Bible passages when they were explaining things.

Moreover, we all learn early in life that in order to have an accurate perception of something we need to examine it from various views. That is one of the great values of having four biographies of Jesus and not just one. And in order to have more complete knowledge of the agent's visit to Cornelius we must read beyond the first description of it.

He tells how they received the Holy Spirit

- **And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as also on us at the beginning. And I remembered the saying of the Lord, how he said, John indeed immersed in water, but ye will be immersed in the Holy Spirit. If then God gave to them the identical gift as also to us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, but what power was I to hinder God? And when they heard these things, they relaxed and glorified God, saying, Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (Acts 11:15-18).**

When Peter preached to Cornelius, he had already spoken over two hundred words before the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Yet in the above passage Peter said he had just begun to speak. Obviously there were many other things that Peter had intended to tell them in his sermon. However, God decided that what Peter preached was enough to immerse them in the Holy Spirit to show how God was accepting worthy Gentiles in his kingdom. Remember Cornelius and the other men had asked Peter to remain with them some days. That would have given Peter plenty of time to finish telling them the things he intended.

After describing how God gave those Gentiles the identical gift that he gave them, Peter finished his report by saying, “... **but what power was I to hinder God?**” Simply seeing how the Holy Spirit fell upon those Gentiles was enough to convince Peter that God was using him to open the door of the church to the Gentiles. Therefore, how could he possibly refuse? Remember, Jesus had given Peter the keys of the kingdom. And it was Peter’s duty to open the gates of it, which he did for the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven. And now Peter had opened the gates of the kingdom to the Gentiles.

After Peter gave his testimony about all that had happened, then the other apostles and brothers agreed that God had “**also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.**” It was the beginning of the great growth of the church among the Gentiles, although it progressed slowly at the beginning.

Notice how they spoke of our soul’s salvation as “**repentance to life.**” That means repentance is absolutely necessary for the gift of eternal life. The first thing John the immerser preached when he began his ministry was repentance. And the first thing Jesus preached when he began his ministry was repentance. No man who does not forsake his worldly life, repenting of his sins, and following the steps of Jesus will ever be given eternal life.

Preaching to the Hellenists

- **Indeed therefore those who were scattered abroad from the persecution that occurred against Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews only. And some of them were men, Cyprians and Cyrenians, who, having come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching good news, the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord (Acts 11:19-21).**

Nothing in that passage indicates that the good news of Christ was being preached to the Gentiles, because the passage says they spoke **“the word to none except Jews only,”** and that they **“spoke to the Hellenists, preaching good news, the Lord Jesus.”** Remember, Hellenists were Jews who spoke Greek and lived the Greek way of life. Nevertheless, the disciples were very successful in persuading many to believe, so that a great number turned to the Lord.

Barnabas is sent to Antioch

- **And the word about them was heard in the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they dispatched Barnabas to pass through as far as Antioch, who, having arrived, and having seen the grace of God, rejoiced. And he encouraged all, with purpose of heart, to remain in the Lord. Because he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a considerable multitude was added to the Lord (Acts 11:22-24).**

Remember, the church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to help Philip when he was converting the Samaritans. The church at Jerusalem was clearly the strongest until Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Jerusalem was where the church began, and the apostles were there.

Having heard of the success in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage them to remain faithful. There were two cities named Antioch during those times. The one referred to here was located on a river about fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea in northwest Syria. The other Antioch was located in the middle of what is now called Asia Minor. It too was eventually evangelized in that early time of the church.

Barnabas brings Paul

- **And Barnabas departed to Tarsus to seek Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came to pass a whole year for them to be assembled in the congregation, and to teach a considerable multitude, and to call the disciples Christians, first at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).**

Barnabas was sent to Antioch because he was not only **“a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,”** but he was a very effective evangelist. That was seen later in his missionary travels with Paul. Remember, it was Barnabas who first brought Paul to the apostles. And after being at Antioch for a while Barnabas went to get Paul to help him in Antioch. Remember, Paul was at Tarsus because the church sent him there to escape the Hellenists in Jerusalem who attempted to destroy him.

Antioch was a Gentile city, and Barnabas no doubt had heard what the Lord said to Ananias, who protested being sent to open Paul's eyes: **“Go, because this man is a chosen vessel to me, to bear my name before Gentiles and kings, and sons of Israel”** (Acts 9:15). Barnabas knew that the Lord had chosen Paul to be a chosen vessel to bear his name before Gentiles. And since Antioch was a Gentile city with many receptive souls there, it was wise for Barnabas to bring Paul there.

The passage above about their work says they remained in Antioch for a whole year assembled in the congregation and teaching a considerable multitude. How they taught is not told. However, we can infer how they did from what Paul later said to the elders at Ephesus: **“Ye know, from the first day in which I stepped in Asia, how I became with you all the time, serving the Lord with all humility, and many tears and trials that befell me by the conspiracies of the Jews. How I kept back nothing of these things that are beneficial, not to inform you, and to teach you in public, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus”** (Acts 20:18-21).

The word Christian is only found twice in the Bible. Once here in Acts 11:26, and once in the first of two letters in the New Testament that were written by Peter: **“Beloved, ye should not be surprised at the fieriness in you, which occurs for a trial to you, like a strange thing happening to you. But rejoice in so far as ye are partakers in the sufferings of the Christ, so that also at the revealing of his glory ye may rejoice, having exceeding joy.**

“Blessed are ye if ye are reviled for the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. From them he is indeed blasphemed, but from you he is glorified. For let not any man of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a busybody. But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this regard” (First Peter 4:12-16).

The most common words used in the Bible when referring to members of the kingdom of God are disciples of Christ. Here are some other words that are used: believers, brothers, the sanctified, the chosen (or elect), the saved.

There is one word that is now commonly used when referring to the good news of Christ that is never found in the Bible. And that word is Christianity. I do not like that name because it includes a plethora of different beliefs and practices. It implies that anyone who believes in Christ is a Christian, regardless of what else he may believe about things Jesus commanded. Moreover, the name itself emphasizes Christians—Christian-ity—instead of Christ. Therefore, I prefer no longer to use that word. I use what the Bible calls it: the good news of Christ.

Aid sent to Judea

- **Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus, after standing up, signified by the Spirit there was going be a great famine in the whole world, which also happened under Claudius Caesar. And the disciples, as any man prospered, determined, each of them regarding aid, to send to the brothers who dwell in Judea, which also they did, having sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul** (Acts 11:27-30).

Notice how it was a prophet from Jerusalem that warned them about the coming famine. Even though Paul was a chosen apostle of Christ, the Holy Spirit used a man named Agabus to proclaim that prophecy. God has always widely shared the blessings of various

resources, including our talents. Only his Son Jesus Christ was given everything without measure.

Regarding famines, remember what Jesus prophesied about such things when his apostles asked him about the future: **“See that not any man may lead you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will lead many astray. And ye are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that ye not be alarmed, for all the things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and plagues and earthquakes in places. But all these things are the beginning of travail.**

“Then they will deliver you up for tribulation, and will kill you, and ye will be hated by all the nations because of my name. And then many will be caused to stumble, and they will betray each other and will hate each other. And many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. And because of the increased lawlessness, the love of the many will become cold.

“But he who endures to the end, this man will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:4-14).

Jesus said there would be famines and plagues and earthquakes in places, but those things were the beginning of travail. For remember, this life is a great tribulation in a world filled with travails. Yet God has promised to give us eternal life without tribulation in a world that will never have any travail—if we will remain faithful to his Son Jesus Christ.

Even though there would be famine in the whole world, the brothers in Antioch wanted to send aid to Jerusalem. Apparently Antioch was a much more prosperous city than Jerusalem, and would not be as adversely effected by the famine. This is the first Bible record of the church in one city sending aid to another.

The church in Antioch did not send their aid by any of the prophets that came down to them from Jerusalem. Instead, they chose Barnabas and Paul. They probably chose them because they had worked in Jerusalem, and they could also bring back news of conditions there after they had delivered the aid. It would have been an imposition to ask those prophets from Jerusalem to make that long round trip just to give them a report of conditions there.

Herod kills James and imprisons Peter

- **Now about that time Herod the king threw on hands to harm some of those from the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And after seeing that it was pleasing the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also (and those were the days of unleavened bread), whom, having also arrested, he put in prison, having delivered to four quaternions of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people** (Acts 12:1-4).

Herod was a very wicked man. Remember, he was the man who beheaded John the immerser. And when Pilate sent Jesus to him, Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus. Even

Pilate did not mock Jesus. The record does not say what motivated Herod to begin persecuting some of those from the church, and to kill the apostle James. However, his arrest of Peter was motivated because he saw that killing James was pleasing to the Jews. It was common for rulers in Bible times to have the power of death merely at their discretion.

The New Testament authors commonly referred to the unbelieving majority of Israelites as Jews, even though they were also Jews. It is often forgotten that the disciples of Christ were always a small minority even in Israel. The Jews that were pleased with Herod killing James were probably those like the rulers and the Pharisees who had always been enemies of Jesus.

At that time the feast of the Passover was also called the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted seven days. Hence, Herod planned to bring Peter forth to the people (the Jews) after those seven day. And there is no doubt they wanted him killed, just as they did Jesus.

A quaternion was four soldiers. Hence, Herod assigned sixteen soldiers to guard Peter. He no doubt assigned that many because he had heard how Peter and John had escaped prison when they were earlier arrested by the high priest (see Acts 5:17-18). Herod did not want Peter to escape because he was such an important leader in the church.

An agent brings Peter out

- **Indeed therefore Peter was kept in the prison, but fervent prayer was being made by the church to God for him. And when Herod was about to bring him forth, that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by two chains. And guards in front of the door guarded the prison.**
- **And behold, an agent of the Lord stood near, and light shone in the room. And after striking the side of Peter, he raised him up, saying, Get up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the agent said to him, Gird thyself, and tie on thy sandals. And he did so. And he says to him, Throw on thy garment, and follow me. And after going out, he followed him.**
- **And he had not seen that the thing happening by the agent was true, but presumed to see a vision. And when they passed a first and a second watch, they came to the iron gate, the one leading to the city, which opened spontaneously to them. And after going out, they advanced one street. And straightaway the agent withdrew from him (Acts 12:5-10).**

The passage implies that Peter hands were chained to the two guards that were sleeping beside him. Nothing is said about the size of the prison nor about other prisoners in it. However, it does speak of a first and second watch inside the iron gate leading to the city. And that implies more than a single room in the prison. Peter was probably kept in the most secure room there. Remember, sixteen guards were assigned to keep him secure.

The agent of the lord brought light in the room so that Peter could see. Then he struck him on the side (gently no doubt) to awaken him. When he commanded Peter to rise up, the chains fell off from his hands. That no doubt happened spontaneously without being

touched. They were not touched by anything visible, but energy from the Lord caused them to fall from Peter's hands. There is always a cause for everything, whether material or spiritual.

The weather must have been mild or warm, because Peter was sleeping without his garment. What kind of undergarment he may have had on is not told. The guards may have commanded him to strip completely. It was common in those days to keep prisoners of war naked. Nakedness makes a man weaker and more vulnerable.

The guards were no doubt kept from awakening by the agent. Here is an Old Testament example of that: **"So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's head, and they got away. And no man saw it, nor knew it, neither did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them"** (First Samuel 26:12).

Peter's release was apparently so swift and effortless that it seemed unreal to him. He had been sleeping when it began, so he thought he was simply having a vision. He had probably been so energized by the agent that he hardly felt himself moving.

The passage does say the iron gate to the city opened spontaneously. It probably opened at the will of the heavenly agent. He did not even need to utter a command. He probably just used some kind of psychokinesis. Jesus uttered a command to calm the wind and the sea, but that was just to show his apostles he caused it. Such powers are impossible for ordinary men, although many charlatans have claimed the ability.

The agent said nothing more to Peter after commanding him to rise and throw on his garment. He just led him out of the prison and away from it one street. Then he withdrew. How that happened is not told. It is just another of a host of trivial details that are not given in the Bible record.

Men love to have such details. It adds color to stories to "tickle the ear," which means to give them pleasure. And for that reason modern men keep preaching and writing things about events in the Bible that are pure fiction. Such books sell well because that is what people like to read. Such perversities were prophesied by Paul when he wrote to Timothy: **"For there will be time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but they will accumulate teachers to themselves according to their own desires, who tickle the ear, and will indeed turn the ear away from the truth, and will be turned aside to myths"** (Second Timothy 4:3-4).

The Bible does not read like a novel, and God will condemn men who pervert it to read that way. For at the end of the Bible, God said, **"I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man should add to them, God will add to him the seven plagues that are written in this book. And if any man takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life, and from the holy city, the things written in this book"** (Revelation 22:18-19). Flee from such writings, regardless of how entertaining they may be.

Peter goes to where they were praying for him

- **And when Peter came to himself, he said, Now I know truly, that the Lord dispatched his agent and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and all the**

expectation of the people of the Jews. And having realized it, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, surnamed Mark, where a considerable were gathered and praying.

- **And when Peter knocked the door of the gate, a servant girl named Rhoda came to hearken. And after recognizing Peter's voice, she did not open the gate for joy, but having ran in, she reported Peter was standing in front of the gate. And they said to her, Thou are mad. But she insisted to have it so. But they said, It is his agent. But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him, and were astonished (Acts 12:11-16).**

It was only after the agent departed from him that Peter realized the reality of what he experienced. The supernatural forces were over, and he found himself free and away from the prison. When Peter came to himself he immediately recognized that it was an agent of the Lord who was sent to save him from the same harm that James suffered. For there is no doubt that Herod and the people of the Jews also wanted Peter killed.

The first thing Peter did was to go to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Perhaps when he was arrested he was informed that disciples would gather there to pray for him. The record says nothing about the time of night when these things happened. However, the disciples were still awake and praying for him. I suspect it was early in the night, sometime well before midnight and not long after Peter and the guards had begun to sleep. Nevertheless, it is possible that the disciples had begun an all night prayer vigil for him, and he was released in the middle of the night.

The response of Rhoda was so human. She was so overjoyed to hear Peter that she forgot to unlock the gate before rushing to tell the others. It is also human for them to have doubted her testimony. They had been praying for the life of Peter. And they no doubt prayed for his release as well. But when they were told it happened they could not believe it. The execution of James, and the swiftness of Peter's release made it difficult to believe.

The slowness to believe was common even among the apostles of Jesus when they were with him. For there are several examples when Jesus chided them for their slowness of faith. That human weakness is common to us all. We pray to God while we still harbor doubts. I must continually remind myself of what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **"And anything whatever ye may ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye will ask me anything in my name, I will do it"** (John 14:13-14).

Jesus promised that whatever we ask in his name he will do. Nevertheless, he did not say when or how he would answer our prayers. Therefore, we must be patient. And whether he answers sooner or later, we should rejoice and express our gratitude to him when he does.

I will never forget hearing the testimony of a pilot who had been flying over Vietnam during the war. His aircraft had been hit by a missile, and it flipped over upside down. On impulse the pilot quickly asked God to bring it upright, and it immediately happened. The pilot said he then thought to himself, "God really did not do it." As soon as he thought that, the aircraft immediately flipped back upside down.

I forgot the rest of the story, but the pilot was able to live to tell it. I hope that event strengthened his faith in God and encouraged his obedience. That interesting testimony is one of many things in my life that have strengthened my faith and encouraged my obedience. And I encourage everyone to remember whatever will strengthen your faith and encourage your obedience.

Peter describes what happened

- **But after motioning to them with the hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord brought him out of the prison. And he said, Report these things to James, and to the brothers. And having departed, he went to a different place** (Acts 12:17).

Who that James was is not told. Two of the apostles were named James. One of them was James the son of Zebedee. Remember, that James was the brother of John. However, Herod had killed James the brother of John before he arrested Peter.

The other apostle was James the son of Alphaeus. Some believe that he was also called James the small man (see Mark 15:40). Other translations call him James the less, but less than what? Many claim he was ranked lower or “less” than James the son of Zebedee. However, Jesus condemned making such rankings. And there is no evidence that any of the apostles had any authority over any of the others.

Another James mentioned in the New Testament was James the Lord’s brother. Hence, Peter’s command to report those things to James was probably to either James the son of Alphaeus, who was another apostle, or to James the Lord’s brother. I am inclined to believe Peter was referring to James the son of Alphaeus, because he was also an apostle. Remember, the apostles were a very select group in the early church, having been personally chosen by Jesus.

Why Peter told the disciples to report those things to James as well as the brothers is not told. Perhaps James lived in a house that was a convenient place for them to gather. If that was the case, then it would be especially appropriate to keep him informed. Not because he had any special office or authority, but because he may have been in a position where he could rapidly inform and gather the others together. Indeed, he may have even been commissioned by them for that role.

It is very popularly believed that Peter was the head of the overall church, while James was the head of the church in Jerusalem (a title they call Bishop). However, Jesus made it very clear that he alone is head of the church, the overall church and every congregation of it. There is nothing in the New Testament about any other heads of the church. It was the false teachings of men who came after the apostles that promoted the idea of heads of churches. Except for the Lord himself, no one man was ever the final authority over any of the other disciples. Besides the apostles, the only leaders of the early church were the elders of each congregation.

Why that hierarchical system of rulers developed in and among the congregations is explained in these words of the Lord: **“And from the days of John the immerser until now the kingdom of the heavens is treated aggressively, and aggressors seize it”** (Matthew 11:12). And Jesus also warned, **“But beware of false prophets, who come to you in**

sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Paul also warned the elders at Ephesus, saying, **"For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And from you yourselves men will rise up, speaking distorted things, to draw away the disciples after them"** (Acts 20:29-30).

After the apostles died, aggressive men, acting like wolves in sheep's clothing, quickly began to seize authority by structuring the churches in imitation of the hierarchy of the Roman government. The New Testament record describes how the members of various congregations were to have their own elders to oversee them. And those congregations were to be completely independent of each other. They were not to be subject to any other authority except for Christ himself.

The word bishop is another word for elder, and those aggressive men began to establish a single ruling elder over each congregation. And they referred to those men as bishops. Then they began to establish bishops over cities, then over larger regions called diocese. Ignatius was one of first of those wolves in sheep's clothing. For in his writings he frequently commanded disciples to submit completely to the authority of the bishop.

Eventually they gave the highest authority to a man whom they all the pope. That word comes from a Latin word meaning "papa" and the Greek word PAPAS (transliterated papas), which means father. Jesus strictly commanded us from appointing any man our father: **"But be ye not designated Rabbi, for one is your leader, the Christ, and ye are all brothers. And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your Father, he in the heavens. And be ye not designated leaders, for one is your leader, the Christ"** (Matthew 23:8-10).

Moreover, those aggressive men also promoted the concept of apostolic succession, which idea means every generation has men with the same authority as the original apostles. Hence, they claimed they had the right to make whatever changes they wanted in church doctrine beyond what they call the primitive church. They promoted the idea of an evolving church with them as its rulers. Aggressive men in sheep's clothing indeed. The protestant movement was a revolt against such men. Nevertheless, beware of such men, for they still exist. Aggressive men keep rising up in every generation attempting to rule churches. And weak believers love to have it so.

The soldiers could not find Peter

- **But having become day, there was no small stir among the soldiers what then became of Peter. And Herod, who sought for him, and not having found, having examined the guards, he commanded them to be led away** (Acts 12:18-19).

There was no small stir among the soldiers because they were responsible for keeping Peter in custody. When Herod learned what happened, the record says that he commanded the soldiers to be led away. What that means, however, is unclear. Other translations say he had them put to death. But that is not what the Greek text says. Being led away is an ambiguous expression, but it does suggest some kind of punishment. For nobody but the

disciples knew how Peter had escaped. Therefore, the soldiers were assumed to be responsible.

Herod is stricken and dies

- **And going down from Judea to Caesarea, he remained there. Now Herod was angry at the Tyrians and Sidonians. But they came with one accord to him, and, having persuaded Blastus the man over the king's bedchamber, they requested peace, because their country was sustained from the monarchy.**
- **And at a set day Herod, having arrayed himself in royal apparel, and having sat on the tribunal, he made an oration to them. And the populace shouted, The voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately an agent of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And after becoming worm-eaten, he expired (Acts 12:19-23).**

Remember, Caesarea was a major seaport located on the Mediterranean sea about fifty miles northwest of Jerusalem. Caesarea was a unique city, having been created by the first Herod for the express purpose of providing a place for the occupying Romans. The remains of it are now in ruins.

Tyre was also a seaport on the coast about fifty miles north of Caesarea. Sidon was another seaport about twenty-five miles north of Tyre. Both Tyre and Sidon were part of ancient Phoenicia, and are now a part of modern Lebanon. And both of those cities still exist.

Blastus was probably an intermediary between Herod and most other people. It is common for rulers to keep themselves insulated from constant demands made of them. Therefore, they appoint aides to screen the applicants who want to have an audience with them. Blastus was probably the chief of Herod's aides, and the Tyrians and Sidonians had to persuade him first. The word bedchamber probably refers to the innermost quarters or offices of Herod where he lived.

Why Herod was angry with those people is not told. The text says they came with one accord to him. However, exactly who came is not told either. They probably sent a fairly large group of delegates to plead for peace with Herod. For he was the king of that area, and the text says that they were sustained by his monarchy. Again what that means is not explained. It was probably about trade, but it could have included things more basic like providing their country with food supplies. Remember, none of such things are important to the lesson being told, which is primarily about why and how Herod perished.

The text says that an agent of the Lord struck Herod so that he became worm-eaten and died because he did not give glory to God when the people began worshiping him. However, do not think that sin was worse than killing James. It was more like the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, or the drop that makes the bucket overflow. If any man deserved to perish it was Herod.

The knowledge that Herod was worm-eaten was without doubt divinely inspired. It is very improbable that an autopsy was performed to find some kind of visible worms inside of

him. Those worms could have been large enough to be visible, although they could also have been some kind of germs. And the author used the word worms because they had no word for germs in ancient times, being ignorant of them.

There are numerous ways to perish, some are more agonizing than others. It seems appropriate for Herod to perish by being worm-eaten. For remember what Jesus said about worms: **“And if thy hand may cause thee to stumble, cut it off. It is good for thee to enter into life maimed, than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not perish, and the fire is not quenched”** (Mark 9:43-44).

Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch

- **But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul turned back in Jerusalem after fulfilling the service, also having taken along John who was surnamed Mark** (Acts 12:24-25).

What is meant by the word of God growing and multiplying no doubt refers to the knowledge and acceptance of it in the hearts of many people. The word of God will always grow and multiply that way when it is given a chance. The greatest obstacle to the word of God is active opposition against it. And Satan is always the spirit behind that opposition, working in the hearts of those who serve him.

Remember, Barnabas and Saul had been sent to Jerusalem with aid from the church at Antioch because of the famine. How long they remained in Jerusalem is not told. Mark must have wanted to go with them to Antioch. Remember, it was in his mother's house where the disciples had gathered and were praying for Peter after his arrest. And many years later Paul told the brothers at Colossae that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas: **“... Mark, the cousin of Barnabas ...”** (Colossians 4:10).

The Holy Spirit sends them on a mission

- **Now there were some men from the congregation that was in Antioch, prophets and teachers, including Barnabas, and Simeon called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen reared with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**
- **“And while they were serving the Lord, and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate to me now Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away** (Acts 13:1-3).

We know nothing about Simeon called Niger or about Lucius or Manaen except what is told here. Paul mentions a man named Lucius in his letter to the Romans, whom he called a kinsman. However, since names were commonly shared, that particular Lucius may not have been the same as the one in Antioch.

Since the text says that Manaen was reared with Herod, then some claim he was Herod's half-brother. However, that is never confirmed in the Bible. It could also mean that they

were reared together by the same nursemaid. For it is common among royalty to have their children reared by nursemaids.

Those three men together with Barnabas and Saul were called prophets and teachers (although Paul was not mentioned by name as one of them in that passage). Regarding prophets, remember, the New Testament had not yet been written. Therefore, it was necessary to have prophets who could speak the will of God for the people. And of course, teachers are always necessary because the teachings of Christ our Lord must be learned.

Teachers will always be with us, but the kind of prophets they had during those times no longer exist because we have the New Testament record. Prophets during Bible times were men who knew the word of God and shared it with others. They also had special powers that varied from prophet to prophet. They were also seers, which were men who could foretell some future events. However, no man has special powers from God now, nor do genuine seers exist any longer. All we need now for faith in Christ is the New Testament record.

Bible passages using the word prophet that may apply to men now, can only be interpreted as being about men who proclaim the word of God because they have learned it from the Bible. For example, when Paul was comparing the ability to speak in tongues (which ability no longer exists) with prophesying, he said, **“But he who prophesies speaks to men edification and encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but he who prophesies builds up the congregation”** (First Corinthians 14:3-4).

No man is now a seer, nor can he speak from divine inspiration the way they could during those early times. Every man making such claims is a liar and a disciple of the devil, regardless of how noble and pious he may appear. And some such deceivers are so adept they even deceive themselves into believing they are genuine. The Bible is now our only source of knowledge about the word of God.

Regarding such deceivers, always remember this warning from the book of proverbs: **“There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”** (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25).

They sail for Cyprus bringing John Mark

- **Indeed therefore these men, having been sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed for Cyprus. And after becoming in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they also had John for a helper** (Acts 13:4-5).

Remember, Antioch was located on a river about fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea in northwest Syria. Seleucia was a seaport where that river emptied into the Mediterranean. Salamis was a town on the east coast of Cyprus. Cyprus is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, being 149 miles long and 62 miles wide. It is located about one hundred miles southwest of Antioch. Apparently there were many Jews in Salamis because the text says they proclaimed the word of God in more than one synagogue there. Barnabas and Paul always preached to the synagogues first wherever they went.

John Mark had gone with them from Jerusalem to Antioch, and he continued to be their helper on this first missionary journey which was commanded them by the Holy Spirit. We know not how old either of those three men were. Indeed, the ages of men mentioned in the New Testament are rarely given. However, John Mark was probably much younger than Barnabas and Paul.

They meet with the proconsul

- **And after going through the island as far as Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name was Bar-jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man, having summoned Barnabas and Saul, sought to hear the word of God (Acts 13:6-7).**

Paphos was on the western coast of Cyprus, and was the capital city of the Island. It was about a hundred miles from Salamis. The text says they traveled through the island to Paphos. However, it does not give details about their evangelistic efforts during that journey. Nevertheless, there is no doubt they used every opportunity to proclaim the good news of Christ, because that was commanded them by the Holy Spirit.

A proconsul was a provincial governor in the Roman empire. Sergius Paulus was, therefore, probably the highest government official in Cyprus. Bar-jesus is only mentioned here in the Bible. He was both a Jewish false prophet and a sorcerer. Remember Simon the sorcerer of Samaria (see Acts 8:9).

Sorcerers are illusionists. Modern illusionists rarely attempt to claim their powers are supernatural. However, in those days people were less educated about magic. Consequently, sorcery was a clever way for a man to gain influence, and Bar-jesus had gained enough to be with the proconsul even though Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man.

Not only was Sergius Paulus an intelligent man, but he was interested in hearing the word of God. The text does not say how he heard about Barnabas and Paul. But as the provincial governor it was his duty to keep informed about such activities, especially when they involved foreigners.

Sergius Paulus not only wanted to be kept informed about what Barnabas and Paul were doing, but he wanted to hear the word of God for himself. Interest in the word of God has never been common among rulers, except when they want to protect their authority.

Paul makes the sorcerer temporarily blind

- **But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) opposed them, seeking to deviate the proconsul from the faith. But Saul (the man is also Paul) having been filled with the Holy Spirit, and having gazed on him, said, O man full of all deceit and all recklessness, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, will thou not cease distorting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, behold, a hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou will be blind, not seeing the sun until a time.**

- **And immediately there fell on him gloom and darkness, and going around he sought hand-guides. Then the proconsul, who saw that which happened, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:8-12).**

Why Elymas opposed Barnabas and Paul is not told. Perhaps it was because Elymas was a Jew. For at that time the Jews were the greatest enemies of the disciples, even when they were working among the Gentiles. Here is only one example: **“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled of envy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and slandering”** (Acts 13:45).

Paul was always very zealous for God, and being filled with the Holy Spirit he severely rebuked Elymas. He said he was (1) full of all deceit and recklessness, (2) the son of the devil, (3) the enemy of all righteousness, and (4) a distorter of the straight ways of the Lord. Not only did Paul rebuke Elymas, but he uttered a curse against him because of his opposition. It was only a temporary curse, but a very effective one. For it not only stopped his opposition, but it persuaded the proconsul to believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.

The remainder of Acts indicates that with that action Paul became a bolder leader and spokesman, becoming more prominent than Barnabas. Barnabas was said to have been a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (see Acts 11:24). Apparently his strength was conciliation. For he was the one who first introduced Paul to the apostles when the disciples were afraid of him. And remember, the original name of Barnabas was Joseph, but it was later changed to Barnabas, which means son of encouragement (see Acts 4:36).

Perhaps Barnabas was too conciliatory to effectively combat opposition against them. Contrary to modern popular opinion by both believers and unbelievers Jesus was not a pacifist, nor did he teach pacifism. And Paul's actions toward Elymas is a good example of it. For pacifism is completely ineffective against the enemies of Christ.

John Mark returns to Jerusalem

- **Now those around Paul, having launched from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia. But John, having departed from them, returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).**

Remember, the Holy Spirit had chosen Paul and Barnabas to go on that mission. John Mark also went as a helper for them. Therefore, we know that those around Paul were at least Barnabas and John Mark. However, there may have been some other men, because we know that Luke the author of Acts was often with Paul during his travels, but he never mentioned himself by name in the book. He would occasionally only say “we.”

Pamphylia was a small province on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Perga was the chief city of it, and was located about twelve miles north of the coast on the banks of a river that served as an inland port. It was about two hundred miles from Paphos, from where they had launched.

Why John Mark departed from them to return to Jerusalem is never told. Remember, the Holy Spirit only commanded Barnabas and Paul to go. So John Mark must have volunteered. And he may have thought he was free to return anytime because he had volunteered. Remember, Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (see Colossians 4:10). And since Mark

had come with them from Jerusalem, perhaps Barnabas invited him to join them on the mission. All we can do is conjecture about his motives for departing from them.

They are asked to speak in a synagogue

- **And they, having passed through from Perga, arrived at Antioch of Pisidia, and after entering into the synagogue on the sabbath day, they sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the synagogue rulers sent to them, saying, Men, brothers, if there is among you a word of exhortation for the people, speak (Acts 13:14-15).**

This was the other Antioch, the one located in the province of Pisidia in Asia Minor. It was about a hundred miles north of Perga. Notice how there was a plurality of synagogue rulers. And the congregations of Christ are to have a plurality of elders to lead them. Nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to have a single ruler over anything in the church, except for our head, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Notice also how Paul and Barnabas were invited to speak to them. I have visited dozens of churches of various denominations, but I have never been invited to speak. Occasionally men who are known as career preachers will be invited. In the New Testament women have been commanded to keep silent in the churches, but not men (see First Corinthians 14:34). However, in modern churches the men as well as the women are all expected to sit as passive listeners.

That is another example of how men in churches have become feminized, being passive listeners, fearful of controversy, and supporters of pacifism. The only time you will see any of that in the New Testament record is when it is condemned. For God condemns the feminization of men. As Paul said, **“Or know ye not that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not led astray. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate men, nor homosexuals, nor greedy men, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor the slanderous, nor the predatory will inherit the kingdom of God”** (First Corinthians 6:9-10). God ranks effeminate men with sinners such as adulterers and homosexuals.

The feminization of men is a modern perversion. It has been accompanied by the masculinizing of women, all in obeisance to the evil ideology of egalitarianism, which is a part of the evil philosophy of humanism.

Paul told how God chose them

- **And Paul having stood up, and having motioned with the hand, he said, Men! Israelites and those who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and raised up the people during the sojourn in the land of Egypt. And with a lofty arm he brought them out of it. And for about a forty-year time he was patient with them in the wilderness.**
- **And having destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he allotted their land to them. And after these things he gave them judges about four**

hundred and fifty years until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, he raised up David for a king to them, also about whom he said, when he testified, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man according to my heart, who will do all my purposes (Acts 13:16-22).

Notice how it was Paul and not Barnabas who stood up to preach to the people. Notice also that Paul addressed not only Israelites but **“those who fear God.”** For God had proven to them that the kingdom of God was open to all men who fear him, not only to the sons of Israel but also to the Gentiles.

Paul began with the history of the Israelites, reminding them that they were chosen by God. Their founding fathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And it was during Jacob's lifetime that they began their sojourn in Egypt. God raised them up in Egypt by greatly multiplying their population. And God used a lofty arm to bring them out of that land because the Egyptians had made slaves of them and did not want them to go.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness forty years because they had been so rebellious. God was patient because he did not destroy them for their frequent rebellions. Indeed, he destroyed seven nations of the land of Canaan, and gave the land to them. He gave it by allotting each tribe their own territory.

God allowed his people much freedom by giving them judges as rulers instead of kings, because kings are virtually always very demanding and autocratic. Yet they insisted on being like the nations around them by having a king. The prophet Samuel was the judge at that time, and he grieved at their demand. Nevertheless, God told him they had not rejected him; they had rejected God as their king.

They wanted a king to fight their wars. So God chose a man named Saul to be their king. Here is what the Bible says about him: **“Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a young man and fine looking. And there was not among the sons of Israel a man better looking than he. From his shoulders and upward he was taller than any of the people”** (First Samuel 9:1-2).

Saul was well qualified to be a warrior king. However, he quickly proved himself to be unworthy because of his frequent disobedience to the commands of God. Therefore, God chose David to replace him. However, Saul rebelled against God's choice and he even tried to kill David. God endured Saul's rebellion for several years, but then had him killed in a battle with the Philistines.

David was a righteous man who had great love for Jehovah. And he remained devoted to him all of his life, except for the matter of Uriah and his wife. David committed adultery with Uriah's wife, who then became with child. David tried to cover it up by arranging for Uriah to be killed in battle. It was a terrible sin that brought God's wrath against him.

David suffered because of it for the rest of his life. He suffered both from his tormenting conscience and from the curse that God sent against him. Nevertheless, David repented and continued to praise God and to serve him the best way he could. David was obedient

to God all his life, except for the matter of Uriah. That is told in this passage: **“... David did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”** (First Kings 15:5).

John proclaimed immersion for repentance

- **From this man’s seed according to promise, God brought salvation to Israel, John having earlier proclaimed, before his coming presence, the immersion of repentance to Israel.**
- **And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, Whom do ye suppose me to be? I am not, but behold, he comes after me of whom I am not worthy to loose the shoes of his feet** (Acts 13:23-25).

God made that promise to David when he wanted to build a temple for Jehovah, saying to David, **“When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shall sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, who shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever”** (Second Samuel 7:12-13).

That is why the people were anticipating the coming of the son of David. That is why many of them called Jesus the son of David. For he was indeed the promised son of David. Remember also that John the immerser came before him to prepare his way by preaching the immersion of repentance. The people were immersed to show that they were repenting.

John denied being whomever the people supposed him to be. Remember this passage: **“And this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent forth priests and Levites from Jerusalem so that they might ask him, Who are thou? And he confessed, and did not deny, and confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What therefore, are thou Elijah? And he says, I am not. Are thou the prophet?”**

“And he answered, No. They said therefore to him, Who are thou, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do thou say about thyself? He said, I am the voice of a man crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, just as the prophet Isaiah said” (John 1:19-23).

There were many prophecies that foretold the coming of the Christ, and because of the Roman occupation the people were especially eager for his coming. The prophet Malachi told about the coming Elijah in the last verse of the Old Testament, which says, **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of Jehovah comes. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5-6).

Also, Jehovah had told Moses about a future prophet who would be like him: **“I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him”** (Deuteronomy 18:18). Jesus was like Moses in being a law-giver and a leader of God’s people.

John the immerser denied being any of those men. John was not the literal Elijah, but he was the figurative Elijah prophesied by Malachi. For Jesus told his disciples, **“For all the**

prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is going to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:13-15). Jesus often spoke in riddles, and he expected the listener to "hear" what he was saying, which means to understand it.

His parables were like riddles, because his disciples often asked him to explain them. Remember what Jesus said about his parables: **"Because of this I speak to them [the multitudes] in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive.**

"For this people's heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:13-16).

Dear reader, be not discouraged if you cannot understand everything Jesus said. And beware of misunderstanding, which is probably worse than not understanding at all. For history is filled with many sorrows created by those who misunderstood what Jesus really said. And such misunderstandings are still very widespread. Remember how he said that if we seek we will find (see Matthew 7:7). Keep studying and seeking for the true meaning of his words, and you will understand. But remember, like everything of value it takes time and labor.

John did not claim to be anyone special. He simply said that a man was coming after him of whom he was not worthy to loose the shoes of his feet. John was a very rugged man, and a mighty man of God. But like every genuine man of God he was very humble.

Paul reminded his listeners of God's promise to David. Then he reminded them how John the immerser prophesied the coming of a man who was much greater than he. Paul next tells how the people of Jerusalem and their rulers killed that man.

They killed the man that God sent

- **Men, brothers, sons of the race of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation was sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, not having known this and the voices of the prophets being read at every sabbath, they fulfilled, having condemned him. And not having found one cause of death in him, they asked for Pilate to kill him.**
- **And when they completed all the things written about him, having taken him down from the tree, they laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, who was seen for more days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are witnesses of him to the people** (Acts 13:26-31).

Paul said the word of God's salvation was for sons of the race of Abraham, and those among them who feared God. He did not try to conceal from those Jews that the good news of Jesus Christ was for all men, both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul said because the dwellers in Jerusalem, and their rulers, were ignorant of that salvation, they fulfilled the prophecies about the rejection of Christ, including his being put to death. However, God raised him from the dead, and he was seen for days afterward by his longtime disciples. They were those who came with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. And they were then witnesses of him to the people. Witnesses to his resurrection, and to the message of his good news of our salvation.

Proclaiming good news

- **And we proclaim good news to you: the promise to the fathers, which happened because God has fulfilled this to us their children, having raised up Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou are my Son, today I have begotten thee** (Acts 13:32-33).

Paul said they proclaimed good news to them, the good news that God had fulfilled his promise to the fathers. Here is the promise that God made to Abraham after he proved his willingness to sacrifice his only son: **“By myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because thou have done this thing, and have not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou have obeyed my voice”** (Genesis 22:16-18).

God restated his promise later to Isaac and Jacob, the other two of their three founding fathers. Paul did not need to elaborate about that promise because it was widely understood and longed for by the Jews. What he did do was tell them that Jesus was the culmination of that promise. For he is the promised son of David, and it is through faith in him that all the nations of the earth are blessed. Paul then quoted the passage from the second psalm that speaks of the Son of God, because Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.

There are several New Testament passages written by the apostle John about Jesus being the only begotten Son of God. Here is one of them: **“By this the love of God was made known in us, because God sent his Son, the only begotten, into the world so that we might live through him”** (First John 4:9). Jesus was the only begotten son of God in heaven as well as on the earth. For the passage says that God sent his Son into the world. Hence, Jesus was the only begotten Son of God before he came into the world. I say much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Christ saw no decay

- **And because he raised him from the dead, no longer going to return to decay, he has spoken this way: I will give to you the faithful holy things of David. Therefore also he says in another, Thou will not give thy Holy Man to see decay. For indeed David, who served his own generation in the plan of God, became asleep, and was added near his fathers, and saw decay. But he whom God raised up saw no decay** (Acts 13:34-37).

Four times in that passage Paul spoke about decay, which is something that happens to the body of every man when he dies. But since God raised Jesus from the dead, he will never return to decay. Then Paul quoted Isaiah the prophet about the Christ being given the faithful holy things of David: **“Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the faithful holy things of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples”** (Isaiah 55:3-4). Jesus inherited the promise of David (the eternal kingdom) because he was the prophesied son of David, meaning a descendant.

Paul then quoted David’s psalm about the Holy man of God not seeing decay or corruption: **“For thou will not leave my soul to Sheol, nor will thou allow thy Holy Man to see corruption”** (Psalm 16:10). Peter also quoted that passage when he first preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:27). Both Peter then, and Paul now told how that passage applied to Jesus and not to David. For David did die and see decay.

Salvation is only through him

- **Be it known to you therefore, men, brothers, that through this man remission of sins is proclaimed to you. And from all things of which ye could not be made righteous by the law of Moses, in this man every man who believes is made righteous** (Acts 13:38-39).

By his perfect obedience to God his Father, Jesus became the only man qualified to be our Redeemer. And that means it is only through him that we can have the remission of our sins. And by having our sin remitted we are made righteous before God. We can only be made righteous that way, because nothing we can do can recompense for our sins against God. We can only accept redemption by believing and obeying his Son Jesus Christ.

No man except for Christ can be made righteous by the law of Moses, because no other man has the strength of his spirit to resist every temptation and obey every one of the laws. In that way God proved the absolute spiritual superiority of his only begotten Son. I speak much more about those things in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul warns them to believe

- **Watch therefore, lest that which is spoken in the prophets should come upon you: Behold, ye scoffers, and wonder, and perish, because I work a work in your days, which ye would, no, not believe, if some man should fully narrate it to you** (Acts 13:40-41).

Paul quoted the prophet Habakkuk when he warned them against scoffing about the testimony of Jesus: **“Behold ye scoffers, and look, and wonder marvelously. For I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you”** (Habakkuk 1:5). The modern world is filled with such scoffers, but God will judge them in the afterlife. Let not scoffers lead you astray from the salvation God is offering through his Son Jesus Christ. Let them not discourage you from believing God’s testimony in the holy Bible. All such scoffers are serving Satan, God’s great adversary.

Many believed

- **And as they went out from the synagogue of the Jews, the Gentiles urged that these sayings be spoken to them the next sabbath. Now after the synagogue was dismissed, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, while conversing, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:42-43).**

That passage speaks of “the Gentiles” and “the devout proselytes.” Since all of the proselytes were Gentiles, that passage suggests there were other Gentiles besides the proselytes who heard Paul’s sermon. There were no doubt many Gentiles who were attracted to Jehovah because they rejected polytheism and all the myths associated with it. However, many of those Gentiles were probably unwilling to commit themselves to the law of Moses with all of its statutes and ordinances. Especially because the Jews kept added many additional laws in what they call “the oral torah.” Hence, they were attracted to Jehovah, but not to all of the laws required to become a proselyte. They were very interested in what Paul had been saying, and wanted to hear more.

Besides those Gentiles, many of the devout proselytes and of the Jews followed Paul and Barnabas to converse with them. The text says that, while conversing with Paul and Barnabas those Jews and devout proselytes were persuaded to continue in the grace of God. What that means, however, is unclear. It may simply mean they should continue to repent of their sins and believe, because faith and repentance are the first things required to receiving the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Remember however, immersion in water for the remission of sins is necessary to become a disciple. And if there was no convenient place for them to be immersed at that time, especially if it were late in the day, then Paul and Barnabas may have been encouraging them to be immersed in water when they were able.

The command to “**continue in the grace of God**” for those Jews and devout proselytes is just too ambiguous for us to determine the precise meaning. Nevertheless, it is not vital that we know what it means, because there are too many other passage of scripture to explain what we all need to continue in the grace of God.

The Jews contradicted and slandered

- **And on the coming sabbath almost all the city was assembled to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled of envy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and slandering (Acts 13:44-45).**

What Paul and Barnabas taught was obviously so new and intriguing, especially coming from Jews (Paul and Barnabas), that the whole city gathered to hear the word of God. For what Paul and Barnabas were teaching was the word of God. However, like the chief priests who crucified Jesus and persecuted the apostles, those Jews in Antioch of Pisidia were envious of the growing popularity of the good news of Christ.

And being disciples of the devil instead of God, those Jews opposed Paul by contradicting and slandering him. Remember, the literal meaning of the Greek word for devil is slanderer. And remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **“Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father. He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:43-44).

The Bible record suggests that most Jews only believed God because they were born and raised to believe so they would be accepted by their people, and not because they loved God and wanted to serve him. Therefore, they were more resistant to the good news of Christ. Their loyalty was to their Jewish heritage and their traditions. On the other hand the Gentiles rejected the beliefs of their heritage. They were looking for something spiritually better, and were more open minded for the truth about God.

Turning to the Gentiles

- **But having spoken boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken first to you, but since ye thrust it away, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have placed thee for a light of Gentiles, for thee to be for salvation as far as the extremity of the earth** (Acts 13:46-47).

Contradicting Paul and Barnabas, and slandering them, were effective ways to oppose them for at least two reasons. First, Paul and Barnabas were strangers and what they taught was revolutionary. Second, few people take the time to investigate the truth about charges of contradictions and slanders. Therefore, the Jews failed to accept their teachings.

Nevertheless, what Paul taught was very appealing to the Gentiles, and they were eager to hear it. Therefore, Paul rebuked the Jews for rejecting Jesus' good news of eternal salvation and thrusting it away from them. Paul said they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. Every man who rejects Christ is proving that he is unworthy of eternal life.

Paul then proclaimed that they were turning to the Gentiles, and he quoted a prophecy from Isaiah that supported preaching to them. What he quoted was from a much larger passage in Isaiah about the Messiah, part of which says, **“And now says Jehovah who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, and that Israel be gathered to him (for I am honorable in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God has become my strength), yea, he says, It is too light a thing that thou should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou may be my salvation to the end of the earth”** (Isaiah 49:5-6).

Paul said it was a command of the Lord for them to be a light of Gentiles and to be for salvation throughout the world. They were commanded because they were helping fulfill the mission of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to be a light to the Gentiles and for salvation to the end of the earth.

The requirement that the word of God be spoken first to the Jews was because of the command Jesus gave to his apostles when he first sent them out to preach and to heal: **“These**

twelve Jesus sent forth, having ordered them, saying, **Go not into a way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**" (Matthew 10:5-6). It was much later, after the church was established in Jerusalem, that God commanded the good news of Christ be preached also to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were glad

- **And hearing this, the Gentiles were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed for eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spread abroad through the whole region** (Acts 13:48-49).

The Gentiles rejoiced and glorified the word of God when they hear those things. For they could then reject polytheism and serve Almighty God without being yoked to the many laws of the Jews. When the passage says **"as many as were appointed for eternal life believed,"** that does not mean they had no choice. That simply means that God predetermined the *kind* of men who would be worthy of eternal life. And whoever chose to make his spirit worthy of it was predetermined or **"appointed for eternal life."**

And that choice is always ours to make, because God is not partial. Remember what Peter said when God first opened the gates of the kingdom to the Gentiles: **"In truth, I am overwhelmed that God is not partial, but in every nation, he who fears him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to him"** (Acts 10:34-35). Every man who fears God and works righteousness is appointed for eternal life.

The Jews incite persecution

- **But the Jews incited the religious women, and the prominent women, and the principle men of the city, and raised up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. And they threw them out of their boundaries. But after shaking off the dust of their feet against them, they came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit** (Acts 13:50-52).

The wording of the text suggests the religious women and the prominent women of the city were the most active in driving out Paul and Barnabas. The principle men were also involved. Women are naturally much weaker than men, which means they gain power from their ability to influence men, which can often be substantial. That fact is often concealed and denied by this corrupt generation.

That was the first of many examples to come of Gentiles uniting with Jews to arouse violent persecute against Paul and Barnabas. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas were not discouraged. They simply obeyed Jesus' command to shake off the dust of their feet against them and try somewhere else. In this case they went to Iconium, which was a major city about a hundred miles southeast of Antioch of Pisidia.

The text says that the disciples **"were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit."** Which disciples are meant is not told. Perhaps it refers primarily to the new converts that Paul and Barnabas had made in Antioch. For remember, the message they proclaimed was the good news of Jesus Christ.

The message of Christ is called the good news because it has so many tremendous blessings with it. It opens our eyes to enlighten us about the truth of God and his creation. It shows us the right way to live. It unites us together in love and comradeship. And above all it offers us the hope of becoming sons of God to live with him in heaven for eternity. Such things are why Paul commanded the disciples at Philippi, saying, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”** (Philippians 4:4).

We should even rejoice when we are persecuted. For remember what happened to Peter and John when they were first arrested in Jerusalem: **“And after summoning the apostles, having beat them, they commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them. Indeed therefore they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were considered worthy to be treated shamefully for the name of Jesus”** (Acts 5:40-41).

Also consider these words of Paul to another congregation: **“We are indebted to thank God always about you, brothers, as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing greatly, and the love of each one of you all toward each other abounds. So as for us ourselves to have pride in you in the congregations of God, for your perseverance and faith in all your persecutions and in the tribulations that ye endure, being evidence of the righteous judgment of God, for you to be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which also ye suffer”** (Second Thessalonians 1:3-5).

The text in Acts says they were also filled with the Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit resides in every Christian. For Paul wrote to the disciples at Corinth, saying, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). And he was speaking about every disciple of Christ. Remember also that Jesus said the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit (see John 14:17).

Nevertheless, how much of the Holy Spirit we have depends upon us. For the more we learn of the word of God, and the more zealous we are for righteousness, the more of the Holy Spirit we will have in us. And we have the ability to determine those things. Do not remain a babe in Christ, but strive to grow in your knowledge of the word of God, and your zeal to obey it. That way the energy of the Holy Spirit will increase in you, and enable you to bear more fruit for Christ.

Having the Holy Spirit within us gives blessings that the world can never experience or feel. For one thing it gives us **“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding ...”** (Philippians 4:7). It even enables us to rejoice when we are rejected and persecuted. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

In Iconium many believe

- **And it came to pass in Iconium according to the same thing, for them to enter into the synagogue of the Jews, and to speak so as for a great quantity to believe, both of Jews and of Greeks** (Acts 14:1).

If there was a synagogue in a town or city then Paul and Barnabas always went there first. Remember, the kingdom of God was first offered to the Jews because they had been the chosen people of God. Moreover, it was logical for Paul and Barnabas to first go to the

Jews because the Jews were more knowledgeable about Jehovah, his holy word, and his Messiah.

Paul and Barnabas also succeeded in persuading **“a great quantity to believe, both of Jews and of Greeks.”** Remember, the Bible often refers to all Gentiles as Greeks. The message about God that they brought was so superior to the law of Moses, and to the myths and superstitions of polytheism that Paul and Barnabas found many people willing to believe. For those who love righteousness, the truth is always more appealing.

Disobedient Jews turn Gentiles from them

- **But the disobedient Jews aroused the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil against the brothers** (Acts 14:2).

The text calls those Jews disobedient. They were disobedient to God because they rejected his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. As Jehovah said to the prophet Samuel when the people of Israel demanded a king, **“Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them”** (First Samuel 8:7).

Evil men often use slander against their opponents because it can be a very powerful and deadly weapon. It is powerful because accusations are commonly assumed to be true. And it is deadly because it poisons the hearts of people against the victims. For gossip and slander produce what is called “character assassination,” which is the murder of a man’s good reputation. And that is one of the most precious things he possesses. For Solomon said, **“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold”** (Proverbs 22:1).

Nevertheless, any man who lives righteously is going to have slander used against him, especially if he is attempting to combat evil. The only defense against slander is truth. For when truth is spread the way gossip and slander is, then those things will be exposed and defeated.

In this adulterous generation gossip and slander are a plague that is widespread even among believers. Dear brother, neither be a part of it nor ignore it. The duty of every disciple of Christ is to actively oppose it. Nevertheless, most people shy away from actively opposing it because of the risks involved. For those who oppose gossip and slander often become victims of gossip and slander. Nevertheless, God will not hold him guiltless who will not actively oppose those evils at every opportunity.

Consider this warning from Solomon: **“Deliver those who are carried away to death, and hold thou back those who are ready to be slain. If thou say, Behold, we did not know this, Does not he who weighs the hearts consider it? And he who keeps thy soul, does he not know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his work?”** (Proverbs 24:11-12). That warning about not helping victims is as relevant to victims of gossip and slander as it is to victims of physical danger.

Nevertheless, if you do become a victim of gossip and slander because of your efforts to promote righteousness and oppose evil, be not discouraged but be grateful that God will reward you. For in the book of Matthew, Jesus was quoted as saying, **“Blessed are those who have been persecuted because of righteousness, because the kingdom of the**

heavens is theirs. Blessed are ye when they revile you, and persecute you, and say every evil word, being deceitful against you because of me. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, because your reward is great in the heavens, for so they persecuted the prophets before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

And Luke reports Jesus saying, “Blessed are ye, when men will hate you, and when they will exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, because of the Son of man. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for their fathers did in the same way to the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).

Remaining for a considerable time

- **Indeed therefore they remained a considerable time speaking boldly in the Lord—him testifying to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to occur by their hands (Acts 14:3).**

Even though the disobedient Jews aroused the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil against the brothers, Paul and Barnabas remained a considerable time there. And they continued to speak boldly in the Lord. For the Lord was testifying to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to occur by the hands of Paul and Barnabas. Apparently the opposition raised by the Jews was not sufficient for the people of Iconium to throw Paul and Barnabas out of their boundaries the way they did at Antioch, at least not for “a considerable time.”

Regarding the signs and wonders occurring by Paul and Barnabas, only God has the power to enable any man to perform such things. Therefore, those signs and wonders were evidence that God was with them; he was testifying with them. For the testimony of the New Testament had not yet been written. Therefore, the Lord gave evangelists like Paul and Barnabas some supernatural powers to testify they were truly sent by God. For God does not want us to believe every man who claims to speak for him.

Always demand evidence of a man’s authenticity. And the evidence of a man’s authenticity in what he says about Christ and his church is the man’s full obedience to the will of God as commanded in the Bible.

They fled from danger

- **But the majority of the city was divided, and verily there were those with the Jews, and those with the apostles. And as a violent movement developed, both of the Gentiles and of the Jews, with their rulers, to denounce and to stone them, having become aware of it, they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the neighboring region. And there they were preaching the good news (Acts 14:4-7).**

As often happened, their opposition by both Gentiles and Jews began a violent movement against them. The opposition even wanted to stone them. Remember, Paul fled when he had been threatened with violence in Damascus and in Jerusalem. It is foolish and senseless for a man to allow himself to be treated with violence when he can avoid it. Jesus only

allowed that to happen to him once, and that was because God commanded it of him. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas wisely fled to other cities.

Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were all in the district of Lycaonia. Lystra and Derbe were to the south of Iconium within about fifty miles of it. Paul and Barnabas never quit preaching the good news of Christ regardless of the opposition against them. For regardless of where they went, if people would listen to them they proclaimed the good news of Christ. And the Lord was always with them.

Paul heals a lame man

- **And a certain man was sitting in Lystra, disabled in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's belly, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul speaking, who, having gazed at him, and having seen that he has faith to be healed, said with a great voice, Stand correctly on thy feet. And he leaped up and walked (Acts 14:8-10).**

Lystra was between Iconium and Derbe. Paul must have been teaching in an open and public place, because the next passage says that a multitude saw what Paul did. Jesus often spoke in open and public places, not only in the temple, the synagogues, and in houses. Public teaching that way is now very rare in America, if not impossible, because of the lack of opportunities. Thank God for the internet, which has now become a great public forum for our evangelizing.

The text says that Paul saw how the disabled man had faith to be healed. The New Testament describes three times when Jesus healed someone and said to them, **“Thy faith has healed thee.”** One example is about a woman who had suffered from an issue of blood for many years. That story is told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Here is the last part of that story as recorded in Luke: **“And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling. And having fallen down before him, she declared to him in the presence of all the people for what reason she touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said to her, Cheer up, Daughter. Thy faith has healed thee. Go in peace”** (Luke 8:47-48).

Another example is when Jesus healed ten lepers. Jesus first commanded the lepers to show themselves to the priests in obedience to the law of cleansing. On the way, when they saw they had been healed, one of them returned to give thanks to Jesus. After he fell on his face beside the feet of Jesus giving him thanks, Jesus said, **“Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner? And he said to him, After rising, go. Thy faith has healed thee”** (Luke 17:17-19).

The third example is about a blind man who cried out for Jesus to be merciful to him. The text says, **“And having stood still, Jesus commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he questioned him, saying, What do thou want I would do to thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive sight. And Jesus said to him, Receive sight. Thy faith has healed thee”** (Luke 18:40-42).

Their faith healed them indirectly. Faith alone has no such power. Their faith healed them because they trusted Jesus and asked him to heal them. Were it not for their faith in Jesus they would not have besought him. And it was their actions of beseeching him that enabled them to be healed.

Deceitful faith healers of modern times often excuse their failure to heal someone by saying they did not have faith enough to be healed. That is even after those afflicted souls came and besought them. Blaming the afflicted that way is not only deceitful but it is cruel to them. That never happened with Jesus. Not once did he ever deny healing to anyone who besought him.

Notice also how the man leaped up when Paul commanded him to stand correctly on his feet. If the man had no faith in Paul he would not even have tried. Paul used the power of Jesus to heal the man because he saw that the man would try to stand on his feet if Paul commanded him.

Faith heals because it leads to actions. Remember, however, God no longer uses miraculous healing to testify about the good news of Christ. His testimony is now in the New Testament record. Nevertheless, prayer still has power to bring about blessings from God. However, he now uses the natural laws of the world including the aid of other people to bring his blessings. And how God brings those blessings is often hidden to us.

The people want to worship them

- **And the multitudes who saw what Paul did, lifted up their voice, speaking Lycaonian, The gods came down to us, having become like men. And they actually called Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the man who led the word. And the priest of Zeus, being in front of their city, after bringing oxen and garlands to the gates, wanted to sacrifice with the multitudes (Acts 14:11-13).**

Remember, Lycaonia was a district in Asia Minor. What was the Lycaonian language is not known. Perhaps it was some variant or special dialect of Greek, because Barnabas and Paul apparently understood it. Perhaps it was like the difference between the modern English and the older English that can be seen in the King James Version of the Bible.

That miracle so amazed the people that they declared Paul and Barnabas to be gods. Remember, the record says that at Iconium Paul and Barnabas did “**signs and wonders**” there. Perhaps none of those signs and wonders there were as astonishing as enabling a man lame from birth to be able to immediately stand and walk.

Zeus and Hermes were mythical Greek gods. The ancient world had invented many gods for themselves, and the people commonly believed in them. Modern skeptics claim that the so-called monotheistic faith of the Israelites developed from polytheism. As usual they have it backwards. Polytheism was a perversion that developed from faith in the true and living God, which man had at the beginning.

The superstitious idea that the gods could become like men was also commonly believed. It too was no doubt a perversion of hearing about heavenly agents visiting men. Greek mythology stories are filled with fantastic and ridiculous tales of how their gods had sup-

posedly interacted with men on the earth. Hence, those people easily concluded that Paul and Barnabas were such gods. And they even prepared to offer animal sacrifices to them. Making animal sacrifices to gods was commonly done during ancient times. And it goes all the way back to Abel the second son of Adam.

Paul preaches the truth to them

- **But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard, having torn their garments, they rushed into the crowd, crying out and saying, Men, why are ye doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, proclaiming good news to you, to turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all the things in them, who in the generations that have passed allowed all the nations to go in their own ways, although he did not leave himself without evidence, doing good and giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts of food and gladness (Acts 14:14-17).**

In those days, when men tore their garments it was a visible sign they were very troubled. What they tore apart was no doubt parts of the garment that had been sewn together, meaning a seam and not the woven part of it. Such tears could have easily been repaired.

Barnabas and Paul tore their garments because they were very troubled that those people of Lystra were going to offer sacrifices to them as gods. And they rushed into the crowd to dissuade them. They made it clear to the crowd that they were mere men and not gods; that is to say, not in the sense the people thought of them. Remember, Jesus said we were all gods because we are offspring of God (see John 10:34).

Paul and Barnabas not only denied being gods, but they taught the people about the true and living God, the Creator, the sustainer and the provider of all good things. They also told them that in the past God had allowed all the nations to “**go their own ways,**” which means he allowed them to make their own laws and their objects of worship. God never destroyed a nation only because of idolatry. It was always because of gross immorality and lawlessness.

Notice how Barnabas was also called an apostle. However, that does not mean Barnabas held the office of an apostle of Christ. The word apostle is a transliteration of the Greek word APOSTOLOS, and in its general sense it means a man sent on a mission. Paul held the office of an apostle of Christ, but Barnabas did not. However, they were both apostles in the general sense, because the Holy Spirit had sent them on that mission.

Jews persuade them to stone Paul

- **And saying these things, they scarcely restrained the multitudes not to sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium. And having persuaded the crowds, and having stoned Paul, they dragged him out of the city, after presuming him to be dead. But the disciples having surrounded him, after rising, he came into the city. And on the morrow he departed with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:18-20).**

The multitudes were scarcely restrained from sacrificing to them because they had been so astonished by Paul's miracle. The people could not understand how that could have been done unless those men were gods. For it was a great supernatural event that they had never seen before.

However, as so often happened, Jews came from other cities and persuaded the crowds to turn against Paul and Barnabas. The multitudes even stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city as dead. The Jews probably did something like persuade the people that Barnabas and Paul were evil sorcerers. They probably told how Barnabas and Paul had been driven out of other cities, and said it was because they were so evil. Therefore, the multitudes turned against them.

Oh how fickle the people of the world are. First they worshiped Paul, and soon afterward they believed false accusations against them, and tried to stone him to death. That characteristic of people is exactly why Jesus never trusted himself to them. Remember this passage: **"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover during the feast, many believed in his name seeing his signs that he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men, and because he had no need that any man should testify about man, for he himself knew what was in man"** (John 2:23-25). It is a sad commentary about the nature of mankind.

Although the multitudes dragged Paul out of the city as dead, the disciples remained loyal to him. They probably surrounded him to protect him from further attack and to help him recover. For God was with Paul and he did recover, apparently with little or no harm. He even rose and returned to the city. Also, the mob had probably disbursed, and the Jews had probably departed to their cities thinking they had been successful in defeating Paul and Barnabas.

Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas even remained until the morrow before departing. They no doubt also gave many encouraging words to the disciples there before they departed. By their words and by their actions they were showing the people that they were genuine men of God.

Derbe was about twenty-five miles southeast of Lystra. And it was the last city they visited on that missionary journey before returning to the ones they had already evangelized.

They return to some of the cities

- **And having preached the good news to that city, and having made considerable disciples, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations. And having appointed elders for them in every congregation, having prayed with fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord, in whom they had believed** (Acts 14:21-23).

Although Paul and Barnabas were persecuted in many of the cities they visited they were still successful in making disciples virtually everywhere they went. How long they had

been gone from their home church in Antioch is not told. However they had evangelized in many communities both in Cyprus and in Asia Minor.

And apparently being concerned about the new disciples they had made they began to retrace their steps back to where they had been. And as they did they (1) strengthened the souls of the disciples, (2) exhorted them to continue in the faith, (3) taught that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations, (4) appointed elders for them in every congregation, and (5) having prayed with fasting they entrusted them to the Lord, in whom they had believed.

There are important lessons in all of those things. We should all encourage our souls and exhort ourselves to continue in the faith. We should all remember that it is necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations. Such tribulations will vary widely depending upon the circumstances of each of us. Nevertheless, every man who strives to live righteously in Christ Jesus is going to have tribulations. It is the nature of this evil and sinful world. For remember, Jesus said that we must lose our life to find it, meaning to forsake our lives of sin here in sacrificial obedience to the will of Christ, so that we can find eternal life in the heavenly world.

Notice how the passage says that they appointed elders in every congregation. The Bible never speaks of appointing a single elder for a congregation. Nor does it speak of one or more elders for more than one congregation. The perverted practice of having a single leader in a congregation is a violation of what the Bible teaches. And the perverted practice of appointing a hierarchy of leaders over a group of congregations is an even greater violation.

They report back to Antioch

- **And after passing through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they spoke the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they were delivered to the grace of God for the work that they fulfilled.**
- **And after arriving, and after gathering the assembly together, they reported as many things as God did with them, and that he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained there no little time with the disciples (Acts 14:24-28).**

Attalia was a seaport city just a few miles south of Perga. That is the only city they had not already visited when they came to Asia Minor. From there they sailed directly to Antioch of Syria from whence they first departed. They did not return to any of the places on the island of Cyprus.

The Bible does not tell the population sizes of any of the congregations. However, the congregation at Antioch of Syria must have been a strong one. For remember Paul and Barnabas spent a year there before they were sent to bring financial aid to the church in Jerusalem. And after returning to Antioch it was there that the Holy Spirit sent them on that first missionary journey. And the above passage says that after reporting all of the

things they did on that journey, opening a door of faith to the Gentiles, **“they remained there no little time with the disciples.”**

If it could be said that Paul had a home congregation, then Antioch would certainly be the one. For it was from there that he began each of his three missionary journeys.

The question of circumcision

- **And certain men, who came down from Judea, taught the brothers, Unless ye will be circumcised in the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**
- **Therefore, no small dissension and debate having developed with Paul and Barnabas against them, they appointed Paul and Barnabas, and some other men from them, to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this issue (Acts 15:1-2).**

That information confirms that the congregation at Antioch was obviously comprised primarily of Gentiles and not Jews. And those men from Judea were obviously Jews, because of what they taught those brothers. It is interesting that the text does not say those men from Judea were also disciples, although they obviously were. Those Jews wanted the Gentile Christians to also obey the laws of Moses. That created another problem that Paul needed to combat. Indeed, his letter to the Galatians was written primarily to combat such men in the congregations. Those men are sometimes called Judaizers, but that word is not found in the Bible.

Notice how the Holy Spirit did not inform any of those men there about what should be done, not even Paul although he was an apostle and a prophet. The Lord has his own ways of doing things. Remember, the Holy Spirit did not directly inform Peter about accepting Gentiles into the kingdom of God. As events progressed it is clear that the Lord wanted those Christians to have a conference in Jerusalem to settle the issue clearly to the church.

Notice the text says that **“no small dissension and debate ... developed.”** However, nowhere is that dissension and debate condemned. Paul only condemned a certain kind of dissension and debate. Here is one instruction about those things that Paul wrote to Timothy: **“But shun foolish and uneducated questions, knowing that they breed quarrels”** (Second Timothy 2:23). And here is one he wrote to Titus: **“But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legalistic fightings, for they are useless and vain”** (Titus 3:9).

Jesus often debated with the Jews in his efforts to convert them. Debating is not wrong unless it involves **“foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legalistic fightings.”** And that question about requiring the Gentiles to obey the law of Moses was certainly not a foolish one, especially at that time in the early church.

Notice how the congregation appointed Paul and Barnabas, and some other men from them, to go up to Jerusalem about the question. Paul and Barnabas were obvious choices because (1) they had been sent by the Holy Spirit to evangelize the Gentiles, and (2) Paul and Barnabas were the men who argued against that requirement.

Notice also how they were sent to the apostles and to the elders in Jerusalem about the issue. The apostles were given the authority to speak for Christ, but the elders were the

overseers of the congregations. For there was no doubt more than one congregation in Jerusalem.

They go to Jerusalem

- **Indeed therefore, having been helped for the trip by the congregation, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles. And they caused great joy to all the brothers. And after arriving in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. And they reported as many things as God did with them (Acts 15:3-4).**

Remember, the church was continuing to grow, and there were no doubt several congregations between Antioch and Jerusalem. And they would all certainly be interested in knowing the success of Paul and Barnabas with converting the Gentiles. And that news no doubt boosted their spirits, causing great joy to all the brothers. Remember, communication in those days was very slow and limited compared with modern times.

Remember also, the message of salvation through Christ Jesus is literally called the good news. Indeed, it is the very best news. However, there are, of course, other sources of good news. And Paul and Barnabas were bringing the disciples good news about the growth of the church, which news was received with joy. The prophet Isaiah wrote a lovely passage about good news, when he said, **“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Thy God reigns!”** (Isaiah 52:7).

Gentiles and the law of Moses

- **But some of the men who believed from the sect of the Pharisees rose up, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and the elders were assembled together to see about this matter (Acts 15:5-6).**

During the time of the early church there was a transition period when Jewish Christians continued to obey the laws of Moses. That was actually necessary for those who lived in Judea because the law of Moses was the law of the land there. Even the apostle Paul remained obedient to the laws of Moses. That was shown in a later time when Paul came to Jerusalem and he needed to demonstrate to the disciples there his continuing obedience to the laws of Moses.

Here is the record about that: **“And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And having greeted them, he reported one by one what God did among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when the men heard, they glorified God, having said to him, Thou see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed, and they are all zealots of the law. And they were informed about thee, that thou teach all the Jews throughout the nations desertion from Moses, telling them not to circumcise the children nor to walk by the customs.**

“What is it therefore? Certainly the multitude needs to get together, for they will hear that thou have come. Therefore do this that we say to thee. Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves. Having taken these, be purified with them. And pay expenses for them, so that they may shave the head. And all may know, that things of which they have been informed about thee, are nothing, but thou thyself also walk orderly, keeping the law” (Acts 21:18-24).

Notice how that passage says Paul walked orderly, keeping the law, which means keeping the law of Moses. However, the Gentiles were never required to keep the law of Moses. That was decided in this meeting that Paul, Barnabas, and other men from Antioch had with the apostles and elders about the question.

Regarding the Pharisees, remember they were apparently the most zealous sect among the Jews for the laws of Moses. And some of those Pharisees had accepted the good news of Christ and became disciples. However, they continued to champion the laws of Moses, and insisted that every disciple must keep them, including Gentiles. It was those men who pressed the issue and provoked this conference about it.

Peter says no to the law for Gentiles

- **And when much debate occurred, Peter having risen up, he said to them, Men, brothers, ye know that from past days among us, God chose the Gentiles to hear through my mouth the word of the good news, and to believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, just as also to us. And he made not one distinction between both us and them, having purified their hearts by faith.**
- **Now therefore why do ye challenge God, to place a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we believe to be saved, in the same way as those men also (Acts 15:7-11).**

Notice how the passage says that much debate occurred. Debates about what is the will of God for us have never been condemned in the Bible. Debates held properly can be very helpful. And at former times in America debates about issues of the church were very common. However, a great spirit of stagnation has now descended. And not only stagnation but a loathing for any kind of religious controversy. Hence, such debates are now uncommon.

We know not who debated or what they said before Peter stood up to reject a requirement of Gentiles to obey the law of Moses. He reminded them all that God chose the Gentiles to hear the good news of Christ (from his mouth), and to believe. And God made no distinction between them and the Gentiles, offering salvation through the purification of hearts by faith.

Peter's belief was that we are all saved by faith and not the law of Moses. For he went on to admonish them for challenging God by making that requirement. He then confessed that neither their forefathers nor they were able to fully keep that law. He called it a yoke

upon the neck. In Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians Paul explains more fully how the law of Moses was a great yoke upon their necks.

Although that law was commanded by Jehovah for the sons of Israel, no ordinary man has the strength of character to avoid violating it. Only Jesus the Son of God was able. I speak much more about the law, and explain why God made it that way for his people in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*. Paul also explains in his letter to the Galatians why God made the law the way he did.

Therefore, since no mere man can obey the law perfectly, it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are all saved. And that grace comes by faith in him, both for Jews and for Gentiles.

Incidentally, that passage is the last time Peter is mentioned in the book of Acts. The remainder of the book is primarily about the work of Paul, most of which was among the Gentiles.

Barnabas and Paul report

- **And all the multitude kept silent, and they heard Barnabas and Paul describing how many signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through them (Acts 15:12).**

Remember, the text earlier said about Barnabas and Paul, **“And after arriving in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. And they reported as many things as God did with them.”** That first report must have been more of a summary than a complete report. For after Peter spoke, they described to those apostles and elders **“how many signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through them.”**

Although this is a complete conjecture, I suspect they may have had a good laugh when they heard how the men of Lystra thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But they no doubt groaned when they heard how he was later stoned severely by the people.

James tells how God accepts the Gentiles

- **And after they were quiet, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, hear me. Simeon described how God first came to help, to take from the Gentiles a people for his name. And to this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David that has fallen. And I will rebuild the things of it that have been demolished, and I will restore it, so that the rest of men might seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called upon them, says the Lord, who does these things. Known to God from the age are all his works (Acts 15:13-18).**

That particular James was probably James the son of Alphaeus, who was also one of the apostles chosen by Christ. What James quoted was from the Old Testament prophet Amos.

And he quoted it from the text of the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew text. The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language. It was done two or three centuries before Christ. And since the New Testament was written in Greek, then the Septuagint is what the authors of the New Testament used in their quotations from the Old Testament.

Here is that passage from the Septuagint: **“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, says the Lord who does all these things”** (Amos 9:11-12).

Here is that passage from the Masoretic Hebrew: **“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof. And I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by my name, says Jehovah who does this”** (Amos 9:11-12).

That prophecy foretells the rise of the kingdom of God established by Jesus Christ the promised son of David. And it foretells how the name of God will also be called upon the Gentiles.

James says no to the law for Gentiles

- **Therefore I judge not to trouble those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, but to write to them, to abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses from generations past, has from city to city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues on every sabbath** (Acts 15:19-21).

James agreed with Peter about the Gentiles and the law of Moses. However, he suggested the above three restrictions be commanded of them. I discuss those things in my comments about the next passage.

James also made clear that the Jews were being taught to obey the laws of Moses, because they were **“being read in the synagogues on every sabbath.”** However, the law of Moses ended even for them when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. And by so doing, God made it impossible for anyone to obey the law of Moses.

Letter to the Gentiles in Antioch

- **Then it was decided by the apostles and the elders, with the whole assembly, to send men chosen from them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, after writing by their hand these things:**

The apostles, and the elders, and the brothers, to those down in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, to the brothers of the Gentiles, greeting. Since we have heard that certain men who went out from us have troubled you

with words, disturbing your souls, saying to be circumcised, and to keep the law, to whom we did not command, it was decided by us, having become unanimous, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have given over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, themselves also declaring the same things by speech.

For it was decided by the Holy Spirit, and by us, to lay upon you not one greater burden than these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, keeping yourselves from which, ye will do well. Be strong (Acts 15:22-29).

Besides Paul, Barnabas, and the other men from Antioch, the assembly chose two other men to go to Antioch with the results of their decision. Of those two men Paul later chose Silas to help him in his second missionary journey. There is one puzzling thing about Silas. Although he was mentioned several times as being active in Paul's second missionary journey, he is not mentioned in any of Paul's letters that are contained in the New Testament. For that reason many believe that the name Silvanus refers to Silas. Because Silvanus is mentioned in some of the New Testament letters.

Notice how the text says the decision about the law and the Gentiles **"was decided by the apostles and the elders, with the whole assembly ..."** Notice also that the letter was stated as being from the apostles, and the elders, and the brothers; that authoritative letter was not from James. All of which is further evidence against the common claim that James was some ruling Bishop of the church in Jerusalem.

The command about those restrictions was restated later by the apostles and elders when Paul made his last trip to Jerusalem. What they said was, **"And about the Gentiles who have believed, we sent word, having decided for them to keep no such thing, except for them to guard against what is sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication"** (Acts 21:25).

Those commands given by the apostles and elders were not for the Gentiles only, because those things had always been condemned in the law of Moses. The first command involved things sacrificed in worship. Making such sacrifices goes all the way back to the first two sons of Adam: Cain and Abel. Remember, Cain killed Abel because Jehovah approved Abel's offering, but not Cain's. The law of Moses also has many commands about making sacrifices to Jehovah. It was their major way of worshiping him.

Sacrificing things to idols was also the major way Gentiles had of worshiping their false gods. Hence, abstaining from things sacrificed to idols meant not having any part in contributing to the worship of false gods. That had always been forbidden to God's people.

In the law of Moses the first two of the ten commandment were restrictions about false gods and their idols: **"Thou shall have no other gods before me,"** and, **"Thou shall not make to thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God ..."** (Exodus 20:3-6).

In his first letter to the congregation at Corinth Paul spoke about the question of eating things sacrificed to idols. That was a different but related issue, about which I make comments there (see First Corinthians 8). The command to abstain from what is sacrificed to idols did not mention the matter of eating what had been sacrificed to them. Paul clarified that question in his letter. And in so doing he made clearer what the command about things sacrificed to idols meant.

The commands against blood and things strangled are about eating blood. Eating things strangled was forbidden because the blood was not drained from the beast, which meant eating the beast would include eating its blood. Actually, the command against eating blood was given long before the law of Moses. For God said to Noah after the great flood, **“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. As the green herb, I have given you all. But flesh with the life of it, which is the blood of it, ye shall not eat”** (Genesis 9:3-4).

Why that restriction was given is never explained. Nevertheless, I have no doubt there is a very good reason God gave that command. And it is our duty to obey his commands whether we understand them all or not. There were many specific commands in the law of Moses about cleanliness, especially with dead flesh and skin diseases. Those ancient sons of Israel could not have known the reason why because they were completely ignorant of the existence of harmful micro-organisms. And there very well may be some hidden biological reason for us to abstain from eating blood.

The fourth command given to the Gentiles was to abstain from fornication. Fornication in pagan America has become rampant. Indeed, it is no longer considered a wrong but a right. For example, Americans have gone from having separate colleges for men and women to coeducation colleges with separate dormitories. Then they went from having dormitories with separate rooms for men and women, to dormitories now where unmarried men and women can live together in the same room, freely committing fornication. That shows the continuing degradation of morals in our country.

Nevertheless, fornication has always been condemned by God. Indeed, Paul warned, **“The foods are for the belly and the belly for foods, but God will abolish both this and these things. But the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ... Flee fornication. Every sin, whatever a man may do, is outside the body, but he who fornicates sins against his own body”** (First Corinthians 6:13, 18).

Paul does not explain what effect the sin of fornication has on the body. It may have some kind of yet unknown biological effect. However, there is one harmful effect it has that is clearly known. And that is the effect on a man's marriage. Even if a man never commits adultery, his previous fornications have a strong adverse affect on the oneness of flesh each man is to have with his wife.

I remember reading about a man who struggled with the memories of his previous fornications after he had married. He said that every time he was sexually intimate with his wife, those thoughts about the other women kept coming into his mind. And that is very harmful to marriage. For one major purpose of sexual intimacy is to strengthen the bond of the husband and wife.

However, like virtually all sins of sex, the world considers fornication to be harmless—yeh, they even champion it as a wonderful way of expressing love. The only things

they now condemn are rape, incest, and pedophilia. Yet there is a growing number of supporters of incest and pedophilia. America's sexual abuses, including the murder of the unborn, are slowly destroying the country. They see bad things happening, but they refuse to admit their sins are the cause of them.

The American people are slowly being displaced by foreign immigrants. It is the same kind of curse Jehovah warned about to the men of Israel. After listing many different sins of sex, including the murder of their children (now widely done as abortion) the Lord said, **"Do not defile ye yourselves in any of these things. For in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out from before you, and the land is defiled.**

"Therefore I visit the iniquity of it upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. Ye therefore shall keep my statutes and my ordinances, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the home-born, nor the stranger that sojourns among you, (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and the land is defiled), that the land not vomit you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you" (Leviticus 18:24-30).

Our land is slowly vomiting out our regular citizens because of their rampant sexual sins, being replaced by immigrants who are flooding in, both legally and illegally. And God will not allow that process to stop until the people repent and turn from their sins.

The letter is delivered

- **Indeed therefore after being dismissed, they came to Antioch, and having gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. And after reading it, they rejoiced for the encouragement. And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brothers by much speech, and strengthened them. And after spending some time, they were dismissed with peace from the brothers to the apostles** (Acts 15:30-33).

The disciples in Antioch rejoiced for the encouragement of the letter because it meant they were not burdened with all the laws of Moses. The text says that Judas and Silas were also prophets. There were many of the disciples who were prophets in those days besides the apostles. For remember, the New Testament scriptures had not yet been written. Therefore, God was using many righteous men of the disciples to proclaim his word to them. But now that we have his word permanently recorded for us in the New Testament, prophets that are divinely inspired no longer exist.

The only prophets now are simply faithful disciples who can proclaim the word of God. For the role of prophets has always been to communicate God's will to man. In the past their ability to perform some miracles and to foretell some future events served to verify their authenticity. However, the text of the New Testament can now be used to verify the authenticity of any man (a modern prophet) who claims to proclaim the word of God.

Returning to where they had evangelized

- **But Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching good news, the word of the Lord, with many others also. And after some days**

Paul said to Barnabas, After returning, surely we could help our brothers in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, how they fare (Acts 15:35-36).¹

Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch expounding the word of God to the people there. However, after a time Paul wanted to return to the cities where they had gone on their first missionary journey. Paul was always concerned about the care of the disciples wherever he went. In a later letter that Paul wrote, he listed all of the hardships he had faced in all his travels. Among them was this one: **“Besides the external things, crowding upon me daily is the care of all the congregations”** (Second Corinthians 11:28). Even though he was strict about obedience to God, he was a very compassionate man. He was much like our Lord Jesus, for whom Paul sacrificed his life to serve faithfully.

They disagree about taking Mark Again

- **And Barnabas wanted to take along John called Mark. But Paul thought it not worthy to bring along this man who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and not having gone with them to the work (Acts 15:37-38).**

That story has a good lesson about forgiveness. Modern men have completely perverted the meaning of the kind of forgiveness God wants of us. The world proclaims that forgiveness means to completely excuse and forget whatever guilt there was, no matter how horrible or heinous. And they claim that Christians are obligated to forgive that way. However, that is a satanic description of our duty to forgive—not the one from God. For God does not want us to forgive that way. Indeed, he himself does not forgive that way. And there are numerous examples in the Bible to prove it.

God did not forgive Moses that way, because the text says about Moses, **“And I besought Jehovah at that time, saying, O lord Jehovah, thou have begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand, for what god is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.**

“But Jehovah was angry with me because of you, and did not hearken to me. And Jehovah said to me, It shall be enough for thee. Speak no more to me of this matter. Get thee up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with thine eyes, for thou shall not go over this Jordan” (Deuteronomy 3:23-27).

God did not forgive David that way, because the prophet Nathan said to David, **“Thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah. And if that had been**

1. Note: Acts 15:34 was omitted from the ACV Bible because it is not in the majority of the Greek manuscripts.

too little, I would have added to thee such and such things. Why have thou despised the word of Jehovah, to do that which is evil in his sight?

“Thou have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be thy wife, and have slain him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus says Jehovah, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. And I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them to thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun” (Second Samuel 12:7-12).

God did not forgive his people the sons of Israel that way, because when Moses asked God to pardon them, the record says, **“And Jehovah said, I have pardoned according to thy word, but in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah, because all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have challenged me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of them who despised me see it. ...**

“As I live, says Jehovah, surely as ye have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you. Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And all who were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, surely ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore that I would make you dwell in it, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun” (Numbers 14:19-30).

Those are but a few examples of how God forgives and how he wants us to forgive. God forgave Moses by taking him to heaven. God forgave David by not taking his life from him and by allowing him to remain king. God forgave the Israelites by not slaying them immediately. Nevertheless, even though God forgave those people, he still punished them. And that is exactly what Paul did with Mark. He forgave Mark, but he punished him by not allowing him to go with him on that second journey. Forgiveness God's way means not totally rejecting the guilty man, but still giving him some deserved punishment.

The devil and his disciples do not want any punishment for their guilt. Therefore, they have perverted the meaning of forgiveness to mean no punishment. And they have persuaded many believers that they are bound to forgive that way. It is a cruel and horrible hoax that has added to the sorrows of many deluded souls, demanding they completely excuse even the most horrible crimes against them. Compassion should be for the victims, not for the guilty.

I speak much more about forgiveness in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

They separate

- **Therefore a provocation developed, so as for them to separate from each other, and Barnabas to sail for Cyprus, after taking Mark, but Paul, having selected Silas, went forth after being delivered to the grace of God by the**

brothers. And he passed through Syria and Cilicia, encouraging the congregations. And he came to Derbe and to Lystra (Acts 15:39-16:1).

There is nothing wrong with brothers disagreeing about matters of judgment and making their own choices. Which is what happened with Paul and Barnabas about taking Mark. Barnabas simply did not agree with Paul's judgment about that punishment for John Mark. Hence, they went their separate ways. Paul and Barnabas first went to Cyprus on their first missionary journey. Since Barnabas chose to sail there first, then Paul took Silas and went by land through Syria and Cilicia.

Remember, Antioch was in Syria. Cilicia was a country in the southeast part of Asia Minor bordering Syria. It was on the way to Derbe and Lystra in the country of Pisidia. Those two cities were the eastern most of those visited by Paul and Barnabas on their first journey. From there they had retraced their steps on their return to Antioch of Syria on that first journey.

As was his intention on this second journey, Paul encouraged the congregations in those places. And no doubt a major encouragement was the letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about the Gentiles not being bound to the law of Moses.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

- **And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain faithful Jewish woman, but of a Greek father, who was well reported of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go forth with him. And having taken him, he circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those regions, for they had all seen that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3).**

Timothy proved to be one of the most helpful men for Paul. He became almost like a son to him. And two of Paul's letters in the New Testament were addressed to Timothy. Nothing more is ever said about Timothy's father, but in Paul's first letter to Timothy he praised both his grandmother and his mother. Both of whom were faithful Jewish women.

Paul begins that letter by saying, **"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, according to the promise of the life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, a beloved child: Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I have gratitude to God whom I serve from the forefathers in a pure conscience, as I have unceasing remembrance about thee in my supplications, night and day longing to see thee, having remembered thy tears, so that I may be filled with joy, taking memory of the non-hypocritical faith in thee, which first dwelt in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that is in thee also"** (Second Timothy 1:1-5).

Paul steadfastly refused to circumcise any of the Gentile converts to Christ. However, Timothy was a Jew. Why he had not been circumcised is not told. However, the wording suggests that the Greeks (meaning Gentiles) opposed circumcision. And since his father was a Gentile, his mother was probably not allowed to circumcise Timothy. Indeed, Zipporah, Moses' Gentile wife, strongly resented having his sons circumcised. For the record says she spoke bitterly to Moses about that requirement: **"Then Zipporah took a flint,**

and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet. And she said, Surely a bridegroom of blood thou art to me” (Exodus 4:25).

However, Timothy was no doubt a mature man by that time and able to make his own decision. Hence, he agreed to have himself circumcised so that he could best serve Paul in his evangelistic work. Remember, Paul almost always began his evangelizing in the synagogues. If Timothy had not been circumcised that would have been a major obstacle in their work, because the Jews would have used that against them.

For when Jehovah first gave his command to Abraham about circumcision, he said to him, **“And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant”** (Genesis 17:14). That command was for all the sons of Abraham in every generation—until the establishment of the church, which is now God’s people. As Paul said to the congregation at Galatia, **“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation”** (Galatians 6:15).

Delivering the decrees

- **And as they were going through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Indeed therefore the congregations were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily** (Acts 16:4-5).

Everywhere that Paul found congregations of the Lord he informed them of the decrees about Gentiles and the law of Moses which the apostles and elders at Jerusalem had determined. And that indeed strengthened the congregations in the faith, the faith of the Lord Christ. The congregations also increased daily. For the message they brought was the good news of Christ. It was good news because it was not only the truth about God, but it gave them the liberty to live righteously without the burden of the law of Moses. For any man who knows much about the law knows that most of it is a great burden.

God never intended to give that legal system to his people. For when Paul was speaking to the Galatians about the law, he said, **“Why then the law? It was added on account of transgressions, until the seed would come to whom it was promised, which was arranged through agents in the hand of a mediator”** (Galatians 3:19). The law was added because of transgressions.

Law is not needed when men do not want to transgress. Men who love truth and righteousness need no laws. All they need is knowledge of what is good and right and just, because they already want to live right. They just need to know how. Thus, God added the law to his people Israel because they loved to transgress. But genuine disciples of Christ need no such laws because they want to live right. Hence, we live by the law of liberty in Christ. I speak much more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

The congregations of those Gentiles **“were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily,”** because many souls found the way of Christ to be indeed good news. It not only revealed the truth of God, but it showed them how to live right without the burden of a legal system. It also made them part of a great brotherhood—the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ—where righteous souls enjoy the loving fellowship of each other.

And best of all we have the promise of God to make us his sons for eternity in heaven with him when this troubled world ends.

A vision about Macedonia

- **But having passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, having come toward Mysia, they attempted to go toward Bithynia. And the Spirit did not allow them.**
- **And after passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul during the night. A certain Macedonian man was standing, imploring him, and saying, After crossing over into Macedonia, help us. And after he saw the vision, straightaway we sought to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that the Lord called us to preach the good news to them (Acts 16:6-10).**

Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia were all districts in what we now call Asia Minor. Troas was a seaport on the coast of the Aegean Sea, which connects with the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Troas was about ten miles from the ancient ruins of Troy.

How the Holy Spirit prevented them from speaking in Asia and going to Bithynia is not told. However, Paul did have a vision during the night, which he interpreted as being from the Lord. That vision seems to have served two purposes. First it explained why the Holy Spirit prevented them from working further in Asia Minor. And second, it informed them of the need for the people of Macedonia to hear the good news of Christ. Macedonia was a district in what we now call Greece.

Arriving at Philippi

- **Therefore, having launched from Troas, we took a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a principle city of the district of Macedonia colony (Acts 16:11-12).**

Samothrace was an island on the Aegean Sea. Neapolis was a seaport on the southern shore of Macedonia. Philippi was the hometown of Alexander, the man who conquered so many ancient nations during the fourth century before Christ. (The world calls him Alexander the Great) The conquests of Alexander were prophesied by both prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, although they did not use his name.

Speaking to women at a place of prayer

- **And we were in the same city remaining some days. And on the sabbath day we went outside the city beside a river, where it was customary for prayer to be. And having sat down, we spoke to the women who came together (Acts 16:12-13).**

There is no mention of a synagogue at Philippi. And in that city Paul only found women gathered for prayer on the sabbath. That indicates there were only a few Jews in the city or none at all. Those women who came together for prayer may have been Jewish proselytes because they came on the sabbath. It must be remembered, that not all Jews worshiped God. Indeed, not many people are aware that most Jews in modern Israel are atheists.

Even though there were no men at the place of prayer, Paul spoke with the women because they were obviously devoted to God. That place outside the city beside a river was probably chosen by those women because it was a convenient place. It was probably just a clear spot of ground like a picnic area. When people want to express their faith in God they always find ways.

Lydia is immersed and lodges them

- **And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, a woman who worshiped God, was listening, whose heart the Lord opened to heed the things being spoken by Paul. And when she was immersed, and her household, she urged us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, after coming into my house, remain. And she constrained us (Acts 16:14-15).**

Lydia was also the name of a region in the western part of Asia Minor. Regarding purple, in ancient times colored dye was very rare and consequently very expensive. Purple was the most available and the least expensive. Therefore, it was the color that was most often marketed. Because of the expense, things colored in purple were considered luxury items. Lydia was a seller of purple, which means she was either a seller of the dye itself, or a vender of purple colored goods. It is most probable that she sold purple colored goods, of which the major kind was clothing.

She may simply have been a vender of purple fabrics. But whatever specific things were that she sold, she was obviously prosperous enough to have a house that could accommodate Paul and the other men with him.

The record says that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to heed the things being spoken by Paul. That does not simply mean she only gave careful attention. It also means she obeyed the Lord's commandment to be immersed in water for the remission of her sins.

When the text says that the Lord opened Lydia's heart, that does not mean he was partial to her. For remember what Peter said at the house of Cornelius: **"In truth, I am overwhelmed that God is not partial, but in every nation, he who fears him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to him"** (Acts 10:35). The Lord opened Lydia's heart to heed what Paul said because she had the kind of heart and spirit that God's wants. And since God is not partial he will open the heart of anyone to heed the good news of Christ if he makes for himself the kind of heart and spirit that God wants.

Remember what Jesus said to the Jews about not believing him: **"But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand"** (John 10:26-28). How God opens hearts to heed the good news of Christ is just one of many mysteries about him.

However, I do make many conjectures about such things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Who specifically were the members of Lydia's household that were also immersed with her is not told. They were probably her women servants who were there worshipping God with her, because they were all immersed at the river before Lydia invited Paul and his companions to her house. And God had no doubt opened their hearts to heed Paul's words as well. For the rite of immersion is useless unless there is faith.

A girl with a spirit of divination

- **And it came to pass, as we were going to prayer, for a certain servant girl having a spirit of divination to meet us, who brought her masters much business by soothsaying. This woman having followed Paul and us was crying out, saying, These men are bondmen of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.**
- **And she did this on many days. But Paul, after being exasperated, and having turned, he said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out the same hour (Acts 16:16-18).**

Divination has always been associated with deceit. That spirit of divination was an evil spirit using that poor girl to deceive people. I will quote a few passages that show how divination is deceit. The first passage associates divination with a lying vision, a thing of naught, and deceit of the heart: **"Then Jehovah said to me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I did not send them, nor have I commanded them, nor did I speak to them. They prophesy to you a lying vision, and divination, and a thing of naught, and the deceit of their own heart"** (Jeremiah 14:14).

The second passage speaks of flattering divination and false vision: **"Son of man, what is this proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision fails? Tell them therefore, Thus says the lord Jehovah: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel, but say to them, The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall no more be any false vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel"** (Ezekiel 12:22-24).

Flattery is another kind of deceit. And it is not harmless, because Solomon said about it: **"A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps"** (Proverbs 29:5). There is virtually always an ulterior motive behind the use of flattery. Always beware of it.

This next passage about divination is a lengthy rebuke from Jehovah against his people Israel. It includes many words against the deceit of their prophets: **"O Israel, thy prophets have been like foxes in the waste places. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, nor built up the wall for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Jehovah. They have seen falsehood and lying divination, who say, Jehovah says, but Jehovah has not sent them. And they have made men to hope that the word would be confirmed. Have ye not seen a false vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, in that ye say, Jehovah says, albeit I have not spoken?"**

“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Because ye have spoken falsehood, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, says the lord Jehovah. And my hand shall be against the prophets who see false visions, and who divine lies. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the lord Jehovah. ...

“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against your pillows, with which ye hunt the souls there to make fly, and I will tear them from your arms. And I will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make fly. I will also tear your head-dresses, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall no more be in your hand to be hunted. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah.

“Because with lies ye have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive. Therefore ye shall no more see false visions, nor divine divinations. And I will deliver my people out of your hand. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah” (Ezekiel 13:4-9, 20-23).

Soothsaying was what we now call fortune telling. All such things were condemned by God, being called abominations to him: **“There shall not be found with thee anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, a psychic, he who practices augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a spiritist, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to Jehovah. And because of these abominations Jehovah thy God drives them out from before thee. Thou shall be perfect with Jehovah thy God. For these nations, that thou shall dispossess, hearken to those who practice augury, and to psychics. But as for thee, Jehovah thy God has not allowed thee to do so” (Deuteronomy 18:10-14).**

Indeed, those things were capital crimes in the law of Moses: **“A man or also a woman who has a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death. They shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:27).**

Wizards were sorcerers. Those having a familiar spirits were like modern mediums. Supposedly the “familiar spirit” enabled the person to communicate with the dead. They too were all deceivers. Here is an example from the Bible about the use of those with the so-called familiar spirit: **“And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night, and he said, Divine to me, I pray thee, by the familiar spirit, and bring me up whomever I shall name to thee” (First Samuel 28:8).**

King Saul was about to go in battle against a powerful army of Philistines. He was so full of fear that he sought to inquire of God. However, God had rejected him because of his frequent disobedience. Consequently, he would not answer Saul. In his desperation Saul sought to inquire of the prophet Samuel. However, Samuel had recently died. Hence, Saul went to a woman with a familiar spirit, hoping she could cause Samuel to speak from the dead.

God actually allowed Samuel to speak to Saul from the dead. When that happened the woman with the familiar spirit was shocked. She was shocked because she knew that people with a familiar spirit were all deceivers using the powers of illusion. For wizards, sor-

cerers, psychics, mediums, those with familiar spirits, and all such kind are all illusionists and deceivers.

God allowed Saul to communicate with Samuel for a special reason. God had personally chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel. But God rejected Saul because he kept disobeying him. Therefore, he wanted Saul to hear what Samuel would prophesy: **“And Samuel said to Saul, Why have thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am greatly distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams. Therefore I have called thee, that thou may make known to me what I shall do.**

“And Samuel said, Why then do thou ask of me, since Jehovah departed from thee, and has become thine adversary? And Jehovah has done to thee, as he spoke by me. And Jehovah has torn the kingdom out of thy hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David. Because thou obeyed not the voice of Jehovah, and did not execute his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore Jehovah has done this thing to thee this day.

“Moreover Jehovah will deliver Israel also with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow thou and thy sons shall be with me. Jehovah will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines” (First Samuel 28:15-19).

Here is a passage about soothsaying: **“Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts, who dwells in mount Zion. And when they shall say to you, Seek for those who have familiar spirits and for the wizards, who chirp and who mutter, should not a people seek for their God? On behalf of the living seek to the dead? Seek to the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them”** (Isaiah 8:18-20). Notice how Isaiah mocked those with familiar spirits and wizards by saying they were those **“who chirp and who mutter.”** For they use empty words.

Here is another passage about soothsaying: **“O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of Jehovah. For thou have forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they are filled with things from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines. And they strike hands with the children of foreigners. And their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. Their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land is also full of idols. They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made, and so the common man bows down, and the great man degrades himself. Therefore do not forgive them”** (Isaiah 2:5-9).

And here is one more: **“And it shall come to pass, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish, says Jehovah, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.**

“But as for you, hearken ye not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon. For they prophesy a lie to you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, that

nation I will let remain in their own land, says Jehovah, and they shall till it, and dwell therein” (Jeremiah 27:8-11).

The girl with the spirit of divination was not one of such sinners. She was simply possessed by an evil spirit beyond her control. And that evil spirit used the girl to witness for Paul and Silas, because she said, **“These men are bondmen of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”**

Remember, there were other times when evil spirits witnessed for Jesus. Here is one example: **“And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him, and cried out, saying, Thou are the Son of God. And he chided them much that they should not make him known”** (Mark 3:11-12). Here is another one: **“And also demons came out from many, crying out, and saying, Thou are the Christ, the Son of God. And rebuking them, he did not allow them to speak, because they knew him to be the Christ”** (Luke 4:41).

Jesus never condemned anyone possessed by an evil spirit. Nevertheless, he never allowed evil spirits to witness for him either. God wants no help for his kingdom from evil souls. (See my comments on Mark 3:11-12 for more about that.) Therefore, Paul finally drove the evil spirit out of that girl. I speak much more about those mysterious spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

They are seized and accused

- **But when her masters saw that the hope of their business was gone, having seized Paul and Silas, they dragged them into the marketplace to the rulers. And after bringing them to the magistrates, they said, These men, being Jews, disturb our city, and proclaim customs that are not permitted for us to receive nor to do, being Romans** (Acts 16:19-21).

The girl’s masters were unconcerned with what Paul and Silas were proclaiming before he cast out the spirit. They only used that as an excuse to attack them with false charges. Remember, the text says that the girl followed Paul and Silas **“on many days,”** announcing they were bondmen of the Most High God who proclaimed the way of salvation. Paul and Silas were not disturbing the city, nor were they proclaiming unlawful customs.

Her masters accused them that way because they were furious their evil source of income was gone. For it was the evil spirit that had provoked the girl to engage in soothsaying. And that kind of assault against Paul and Silas is a common practice by all disciples of the devil against righteous souls. They often leave us alone until we begin to oppose their evil. Then they become very hostile and make many false accusations. Be prepared for that when you oppose evil men.

They are beaten and imprisoned

- **And the multitude rose up together against them. And the magistrates, having torn off their clothes, commanded to beat them with rods. And having laid many blows upon them, they cast them into prison, having ordered the jailor to guard them securely, who, having received such an**

order, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24).

Notice how the record says the multitude rose up together against Paul and Silas. Sinners love things like soothsaying. Therefore, it was apparently easy to arouse the multitude against Paul and Silas. I remember reading many years ago about a young man who became skilled with magic. He told about being in a church service where the preacher was using magic to proclaim he had the ability to perform miracles. When the young man rose and exposed him as an illusionist, what do you think the congregation did? Rather than turn away from the preacher, they cast the young man out of the building.

Those magistrates were obviously more concerned about pacifying the accusers than they were of administering justice. That too is a common practice by worldly judges and rulers. For them, the will of a mob is more important than truth. I have seen that happen many times, especially when there is a threat of violence.

The text does not say how many blows were laid upon Paul and Silas. The law of Moses allowed corporal punishment, but limited the blows to forty: **“If there be a controversy between men, and they come to judgment, and they judge them, then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the iniquitous. And it shall be, if the iniquitous man is deserving to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his iniquity, by number. He may give him forty stripes. He shall not exceed, lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem debased to thee”** (Deuteronomy 25:1-3).

Notice how the law forbade using corporal punishment to debase a man of Israel. However, the Gentiles had no such laws that I am aware of. Indeed, the flogging of prisoners commonly produced injury to their skin. And that was what happened to Paul and Silas. For the text farther on speaks of having their stripes washed.

The stocks were commonly two large wooden boards with notches for the ankles, one board over the other, so as to restrain prisoners. Stocks have also been made for the head and the hands, and they were used even in early America. As with everything those stocks could be abused, but in the case of Paul and Silas they were merely used to constrain them, similar to the way handcuffs are used nowadays.

Paul and Silas pray and praise

- **Now toward midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, were singing praises to God, and the prisoners were listening to them** (Acts 16:25).

Paul and Silas were both Hebrews who were able to speak the Greek language. Which particular language they used when they were praying and singing there in prison is not told. Nevertheless, the other prisoners were not disturbed by their voices, even though it was midnight. Their voices were probably pleasant to hear, especially their singing.

We who are disciples of Christ have a special relationship with God, being his children. And we have the assurance of his ever presence and protection. Therefore, like Paul and Silas, instead of weeping and cursing when we are abused and treated unjustly, we can pray and sing praises to our savior God. We may be persecuted for our faithfulness to

Christ, but God has given us many compensations, including the joy of our heart and the peace of our mind that sinners can never experience.

An earthquake frees their bonds

- **And suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so as for the foundations of the prison to shake. And immediately all the doors were opened, and the bonds of all the men were unfastened (Acts 16:26).**

Was that earthquake a coincidence? Was it a miracle? It was neither one. It was no doubt caused by God, but it was not a miracle. No earthquake is a miracle, even though God causes them. Miracles are when the laws of nature are bypassed. Earthquakes are natural events not supernatural. True miracles occurred in the past but no longer. What people now call miracles are very rare, remarkable, or astonishing events. They are events so unexpected they seem to be miracles, but they are not.

Nevertheless, God still intervenes in the affairs of men, but not with miracles. He does it by manipulating his laws of nature. God has reserved for himself the power to manipulate things in the world within his laws of nature. He has so made the world and the laws of it so he can do that. This world is not like a machine that is bound to perform in certain ways. The events of the world are not all predetermined, nor is what we do predetermined.

There is much more to be said about the matter of determinism, which I do in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*. I mention the subject here because of the above example of God intervening in the world. Paul and Silas were praying and praising God. And their prayers were not in vain, because God responded. Not by a miracle, but through a natural event. And he can intervene in the world in response to our prayers as well. And he does it without performing miracles, although sometimes what happens seems like a miracle to us.

Paul saves the jailer's life

- **And the jailor, who became awake and who saw the prison doors opened, having drawn out a sword was going to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have fled. But Paul cried out in a great voice, saying, Do nothing harmful to thyself, for we are all here (Acts 16:27-28).**

The values of some countries have required that men who fail in their duties that way take their own lives. And that was obviously why the jailer was going to kill himself. He thought all the prisoners had fled because the earthquake had freed them of their bonds. And since he was responsible for keeping them securely bound, he felt he had failed.

However, none of the prisoners fled. I have no doubt that was part of God's intervention. God had probably made those prisoners too awestruck and fearful to flee. Remember, the earthquake occurred in the middle of the night, in the darkness of night. Moreover, it occurred while Paul and Silas were praying and praising God. It would have been easy for those prisoners to associate what Paul and Silas were doing with that earthquake that freed them all.

Paul was the man who cried out to save the life of the jailer. Apparently none of the other prisoners responded. They were not the kind of men who would have had compassion for the man who was keeping them bound. But Paul was not a common criminal. He was not a criminal at all. Paul did not deserve being there. Yet he had no bitterness against the jailer, who not only kept him incarcerated, but had his feet placed in the stocks.

Paul's action was a great example of Jesus' command to bless our enemies. The jailer was Paul's enemy because he was keeping him bound. Yet the jailer was not a wicked man; he was just doing his duty. And those are the kinds of enemies Jesus wants us to bless, not wicked men like king Herod. How many times did Jesus or any of his apostles ever bless king Herod? Not once. Remember, Jesus even refused to speak to that wicked man (see Luke 23:8-9). It is the devil and his disciples that demand we bless wicked men.

The jailer asks how to be saved

- **And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and having become trembling, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And after bringing them outside, he said, Sirs, what must I do so that I may be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou will be saved, thou and thy household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all those in his house (Acts 16:29-32).**

The first thing the jailer did was to ask for lights. The other guards had probably arrived to help secure the prison by that time. The jailer then rushed in, trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. The jailer knew that Paul and Silas were preachers, and he probably also knew they had been praying that night. And he no doubt made the association with their praying and the earthquake. Moreover, he was also no doubt astonished that none of the prisoners had attempted to escape. And he was doubtless very grateful that Paul had stopped him from taking his life.

Consequently, the jailer was convinced that what the girl with the spirit of divination had been saying about them was true: **“These men are bondmen of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation”** (Acts 16:17). Hence, he brought them outside of the prison and asked what he needed to do so that he may be saved.

Notice how the record says the jailer first fell down before Paul and Silas. In his great vision of heaven the apostle John fell down before the feet of a heavenly agent: **“And I am John, the man hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the agent showing me these things. And he says to me, See thou not. I am thy fellow bondman, and of thy brothers the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”** (Revelation 22:8-9).

John fell down before the agent to worship him. However, the jailer did not fall down before Paul and Silas to worship them. Hence, there was no need for Paul and Silas to warn the jailer about falling down before them as the agent from heaven had warned John. That example of the jailer shows us there are times when there is nothing wrong with falling down before other men. In the past Americans commonly bowed before other men as a courtesy. However, this generation of pagan Americans have become too proud and egalitarian to show courtesy by bowing.

In answer to the jailer's question about his salvation, Paul said, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou wilt be saved, thou and thy household."** That means his household would also be saved if they believed in the Lord Jesus. Notice, however, the text says that Paul and Silas **"spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all those in his house."** They taught them more than just believing in the Lord Jesus, because the jailer and his household probably knew very little about Christ and his church.

The jailer is immersed

- **And having taken them in that hour of the night, he washed from the stripes, and was immersed, he and all those of him, immediately. And having brought them into his house, he set out a table, and rejoiced, having believed in God with all his house (Acts 16:33-34).**

The wounds caused by the flogging needed immediate attention. Thus, the jailer first washed from the stripes. Then straightaway afterward he and all those of him were immersed. He did not delay. That is just more evidence of the importance and the necessity of being immersed in water for the remission of our sins for our salvation.

Although Paul and Silas were still officially prisoners, the jailer brought them into his house, fed them, and rejoiced. He rejoiced because he obeyed the good news of Christ, which has the promise of eternal life. And no doubt he rejoiced all the more because all his household also believed in God to receive salvation.

The magistrates come and release them

- **But when it became day, the magistrates sent out the police, saying, Release those men. And the jailor reported these words to Paul: The magistrates have sent out so that ye may be released. Now therefore after coming out, go in peace.**
- **But Paul said to them, Having beaten us publicly, uncondemned men, being Romans, they cast us into prison, and now they thrust us out privately? Certainly not, but after coming, they shall lead us out. And the police reported these sayings to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.**
- **And having come they besought them, and when they brought them out, they asked them to go out of the city. And having departed from the prison, they came in to Lydia. And after seeing the brothers, they encouraged them, and departed (Acts 16:35-40).**

Paul was not egotistical for demanding the magistrates themselves come and lead them out of prison. There were at least two reasons for his demand. First, it was only just and right for those authorities to come personally. For they had committed a crime against Paul and Silas by how they judged and punished them. It was illegal to treat Roman citizens that

way. Being a Roman citizen gave a man special privileges not available to most other men during those times.

That is why the magistrates were afraid when they learned that Paul and Silas were Romans. Actually Paul and Silas could have gone to higher authorities and brought charges against those magistrates. What Paul demanded of them was slight compared with how he could have brought much trouble to those magistrates for having treated them that way. In modern America lawyers would have seized upon such an occasion to seek much profits from those magistrates.

Second, Paul no doubt wanted his Christian brothers to be strengthened in their faith. Paul showed them how it was good and right for them to demand their legal rights when they were being persecuted for serving the Lord Jesus. And that is true of all of us. We are not to surrender to our enemies when they oppose us. We should **“fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12).

And remember what Jesus said to his apostles: **“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Become ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves”** (Matthew 10:16). We are to use our wisdom when we fight the good fight of the faith. And that is exactly what Paul did with his demand. He had legal rights and he no doubt wanted his brothers to know he was using them.

Nevertheless, Paul and Silas did leave the city at the request of the magistrates, but only after they had seen the brothers and encouraged them. It was wise for Paul and Silas to agree to leave the city, because it would have been dangerous for them to remain. Paul almost always shook off the dust of his feet and departed where there was violent opposition against him.

Remember what happened in Antioch of Pisidia: **“And the word of the Lord was spread abroad through the whole region. But the Jews incited the religious women, and the prominent women, and the principle men of the city, and raised up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. And they threw them out of their boundaries. But after shaking off the dust of their feet against them, they came to Iconium”** (Acts 13:49-51). And there are other examples.

Paul taught in Thessalonica

- **Now after passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went in to them, and for three sabbaths he discoursed with them from the scriptures, explaining and pointing out that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead, and, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.**
- **And some of them were persuaded, and joined with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great quantity, and of the prominent women not a few** (Acts 17:1-4).

Amphipolis was a city located about thirty miles southwest of Philippi. Apollonia and Thessalonica were also cities located southwest of Philippi. All three of those cities were

roughly thirty miles apart. Hence, Thessalonica was about a hundred miles southwest of Philippi. All four of those cities were in Macedonia. Thessalonica was the chief seaport of that province.

Paul always preached first to the synagogues. The people in them were most familiar with God and the prophecies of the Messiah. The goal of an evangelist is to harvest souls for the Lord. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the workmen are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth workmen into his harvest”** (Matthew 9:37-38). And he was speaking of the harvest of souls.

A wise farmer who wants to have a rich harvest will work in the most productive fields. He will not waste his time attempting to harvest from barren places. And wise evangelists for the Lord will work in the most productive places not in barren ones. There is no evidence that Paul ever went to places like saloons and whore houses to evangelize (or for any other purpose). He labored where the harvest was most promising. Paul only preached in areas like the marketplaces when there were no other opportunities.

Believing that Jesus was the Son of God was difficult for many Jews because of how Jesus lived. They expected the Messiah to be a warrior-king like David. However, Jesus lived the life of a poor man and enduring much suffering. Remember how the rulers of the Jews continually opposed him, eventually having him crucified. It was necessary for Paul to explain how those things were all part of God’s divine plan. And God gave absolute proof that Jesus was his Son by raising him from the dead, after which he revealed him to many witnesses among his disciples.

Wherever Paul went he made some converts. Remember, God was always with Paul, giving him the power to perform signs and wonders. Most of his converts were devout Gentiles. They were those who were hungry for truth and righteousness. Therefore, they eagerly accepted the good news of Jesus Christ because it is so far superior to any other belief.

Scoffers always claim that only the ignorant and foolish believe what is taught in the word of God. However, the record shows that prominent men and prominent women have become believers. The ignorant and the foolish believe the erroneous. However, the authentic good news of Christ, which is revealed in the words of the New Testament, contain words of truth and righteousness. And those who have more than just worldly wisdom can see them.

Jews gather a mob against them

- **But the disobedient Jews having taken along certain evil men of the marketplaces, and having gathered a mob, were rioting the city. And having stood by the house of Jason, they sought to bring them out to the populace. And not having found them, they dragged Jason and some brothers to the city rulers, shouting, The men who have agitated the world, these are present here also, whom Jason has received. And all these men are acting against the decrees of Caesar, asserting another man to be king, Jesus.**

- **And they disturbed the multitude and the city rulers when they heard these things. And after taking bond from Jason and the other men, they released them** (Acts 17:5-9).

When those who oppose us cannot win by reason, and they see that we are convincing many others, they commonly resort to violence. That happened often to the apostles, including Paul. Therefore, those disobedient Jews sought out the worse class of men to create a mob and begin rioting the city.

There have always been bums and tramps in every society. And they often congregate in the marketplaces to beg. Most of them are sluggards and drunkards, unfit for anything useful. Hence, they must either beg or rob. Such men love to riot, because that gives them the opportunity to loot and plunder. Those rioters were not interested in doctrinal matters.

It was the disobedient Jews who attacked the disciples and brought false charges against them. They cited the false accusations that had been made against Paul and Silas in other cities. And they accused them of agitating the world and acting against the decrees of Caesar. And like the mob that demanded Jesus be crucified, they claimed Jesus was a rival to the throne of Caesar. Our enemies dredge up everything they can learn about us, pervert it into lies, and then use those lies against us. For words have the power to destroy. As Solomon said, **“The hypocrite destroys his neighbor with his mouth, but the righteous shall be delivered through knowledge”** (Proverbs 11:9).

However, unlike the rulers at Philippi, the rulers at Thessalonica simply took bond from the brothers who had been accused and released them. A bond is taken from those accused to insure they will return for a court hearing.

Those in Berea were more noble

- **And the brothers straightaway sent both Paul and Silas away through the night to Berea, who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews. But these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all willingness, examining the scriptures daily, if it has these things this way. Indeed therefore many of them believed, also of the prominent Greek women and men, not a few** (Acts 17:10-12).

Because of the dangers there **“the brothers straightaway sent both Paul and Silas away through the night to Berea... .”** There was still danger there for Paul and Silas because the Jews had **“disturbed the multitude and the city rulers”** The brothers judged the dangers for Paul and Silas were too great for them to stay.

It is always best for evangelists to flee from the danger of violent opposition, especially when there is little or no protection by the civil authorities. Fleeing violence is not defeat, because violence is only for the moment. When there are people that are open to reason the good news of Christ always succeeds over temporary eruptions of violent opposition. And that was true of Thessalonica. Remember what the record says about some of the people there: **“And some of them were persuaded, and joined with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great quantity, and of the prominent women not a few.”** Indeed,

the church grew strong there, because two of Paul's letters in the New Testament were written to the congregation in Thessalonica.

Berea was about fifty miles to the west of Thessalonica. The people of Berea were a good example to show how the character of communities differ, just as the character of individuals differ. For the text says they were more noble than those in Thessalonica, meaning the majority of the people in Thessalonica and their rulers.

The men of Berea had the childlike spirit that Jesus said was required for the kingdom of God. They were humble, open minded, and eager to learn the truth. For they examined the scriptures daily to verify the truth of the good news of Christ. And that is what each one of us should do if we also want to be judged as being more noble.

The scriptures that the people of Berea examined were from the Old Testament, because none of the books of the New Testament were yet available. Jesus and his apostles frequently quoted from the Old Testament to verify the truth of what they were teaching. We as Christians have a double blessing of scriptures: both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Remember what the Lord said about his lessons: **“Jesus says to them, Have ye understood all these things? They say to him, Yes, Lord. And he said to them, Because of this every scholar who has been instructed in the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a house-ruler, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old”** (Matthew 13:51-52). By having the whole Bible we can now bring forth out of that treasure knowledge of spiritual things both new and old. And spiritual knowledge is the greatest of all knowledge, because the spiritual reality is much greater.

Consequently, we too should be **“examining the scriptures daily.”** Those who neglect examining the scriptures soon fall away into error. Trying to serve God without using the light of his holy word is like trying to travel in the darkness. That is why the devil and his disciples do everything they can to discredit the Bible, and discourage people from examining what it says. Whether a man claims to be a believer or an unbeliever, if he discourages you from personally examining the scriptures daily, he is serving the devil.

Notice how the text says that prominent women of the Gentiles, both in Thessalonica and in Berea, became believers. That was, of course, in addition to the believing men there. The record is not implying that the prominent women of the Gentiles were more righteous. For remember what happened at Antioch of Pisidia: **“But the Jews incited the religious women, and the prominent women, and the principle men of the city, and raised up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. And they threw them out of their boundaries”** (Acts 13:50).

Jews came and agitated the crowds

- **But when the Jews of Thessalonica also learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea, they came there also, agitating the crowds. But then straightaway the brothers sent Paul away to go as far as to the sea, but both Silas and Timothy remained there. And those who brought Paul led him as far as Athens. And after taking a command for Silas and**

Timothy, that they should come to him quickly, they departed (Acts 17:13-15).

Contrary to modern propaganda, the Jews were the most vicious enemies of the good news of Christ. They were so hateful that they followed Paul from city to city so they could stir up trouble in an effort to destroy him. They were most active against Paul because he was the most successful evangelist. And they justified themselves by thinking they were serving God. Remember the warning that Jesus gave to his apostles: **“They will make you excommunicated from the synagogues. But the hour comes that every man who kills you will presume to be offering service to God. And they will do these things, because they have not known the Father nor me”** (John 16:2-3).

Apparently Paul was willing to remain in spite of the agitated crowds. However, the brothers loved him too much to allow him to risk remaining there. Therefore, they took him to Athens, which was about two hundred miles south of Berea. Athens is in Greece, and it is one of the most famous of the Ancient cities. It was renowned as a center of wisdom and learning. Many famous intellectuals were citizens of Athens. And the architecture of their monuments has been copied world-wide.

Why Silas and Timothy remained behind is not told. Perhaps it was to mislead the hostile Jews into thinking that Paul was still there. Paul commanded them to follow him quickly. However, I suspect they waited until those hostile Jews disbursed before going to him. For they no doubt did not want to lead them to where Paul was.

Paul discourses in Athens

- **But while Paul waited for them in Athens, his spirit was aroused within him, seeing the city being completely idolatrous. Indeed therefore he was discoursing in the synagogue with the Jews, and with those who worship, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened by** (Acts 17:16-17).

Paul never stopped evangelizing whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. He discoursed about the good news of Christ in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worship. That was no doubt primarily on the sabbath day during their regular assembly. However, they may have had other activities there on other days when he could have taught them. Besides discoursing with the Jews Paul discoursed “with those who worship.” Those probably included the proselytes as well as other Gentiles who came to worship God.

When the synagogue was not being used, Paul discoursed in the marketplace every day with those who happened by. When the passage says “every day,” that suggests the meetings at the synagogue did not last the full day of the sabbath. The marketplace has traditionally been a place where the people gathered not only to buy and sell merchandise, but also to visit with each other. And Paul used that opportunity to teach about the good news of Christ.

The marketplaces of the past were public property, and Paul had the right to evangelize there. However, most modern marketplaces are now on private property, which makes

evangelizing in such places more difficult. And as hostility grows against us there are becoming fewer opportunities to evangelize in public places. Nevertheless, God has provided an new kind of marketplace for us, enabling an even greater public forum, which place is called the internet or the world wide web.

Brought to the Areopagus

- **And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, Whatever does this babbler want to say? But others, He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities, because he brought the good news—Jesus and the resurrection.**
- **And having taken him, they brought him to the Areopagus, saying, Can we understand what this new doctrine is, being spoken by thee? For thou bring some surprising things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know whatever these things aim to be.**
- **Now all the Athenians, and the foreigners who dwell alien there, were at leisure in nothing else, than to tell or to hear something new (Acts 17:18-21).**

One of the things that made the Athenians renown for their wisdom was their open-mindedness. Another was their intense interest in learning about new things. Indeed, the record says that they spent all of their spare time doing nothing but sharing with each other ideas about new things. That kind of interest can be a virtue but only when the goal is truth and righteousness. Paul gave an example of the useless pursuit of learning when he spoke of **“petty women laden with sins, being led away by various impulses, ever learning and never able to come to knowledge of truth”** (Second Timothy 3:6-7).

According to a dictionary that I use, the Areopagus was “A hill to the west of the Athenian acropolis where met the highest governmental council of ancient Athens and later a judicial court.” An acropolis was a citadel on a hill. The Athenian acropolis also contained the Parthenon, which was the famous temple of the goddess Athena. Obviously the Acropolis during the time of Paul also served as a forum, because that is why they brought him to that place.

There is a replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee. The people call their city “The Athens of the South” because they have so many institutions of education there. They created that replica for their centennial exposition in 1897. It was originally constructed as a temporary building, but they decided to make it permanent. At first it only had a tiny doll sized idol of Athena. However, in 1990 they created a forty-two foot high idol of her (of what they thought she may have look like). It is only a matter of time before people of pagan America begin to worship that huge (but hollow) idol.

Idolatry in Athens

- **And having stood in the middle of the Areopagus, Paul said, Athenian men, I perceive you as deity-fearing in all things. For, passing through and**

examining your religious objects, I also found an altar on which had been engraved, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul began by mentioning how he noticed their commitment to religion, as witnessed by their religious objects. Although he did not mention their idols, remember the passage saying that Paul saw **“the city being completely idolatrous.”** Paul may have refrained from mentioning their idols because they probably knew how the Jews condemned idolatry. Hence, Paul mentioned that particular altar to introduce his lesson.

Paul too was ever learning, but always for the purpose of promoting the good news of Jesus Christ. And his examination of their religious objects revealed an altar to the unknown God. That altar was obviously created so they would not neglect recognition of any of the gods. And that was further evidence of their seriousness toward religion, albeit in great ignorance. Awareness of that altar gave Paul the occasion to introduce Jehovah God to them, which is described next.

Paul describes God

- **Whom therefore ye worship unknowingly, him I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things (Acts 17:23-25).**

Their altar to the unknown god gave Paul the perfect opportunity to teach them about the true God. For he pointed out to them how they were already worshiping him with that altar. However, they were worshiping him in ignorance, admitted ignorance because they called him unknown.

Paul then taught them about God from the knowledge we have in the Holy Bible. Jehovah God is nothing like the mythical gods of the Gentile world. Paul said that God (1) **“made the world and all things in it,”** (2) was **“Lord of heaven and earth,”** (3) **“dwells not in temples made with hands,”** (4) is not **“served by the hands of men, as needing anything,”** and (5) **“gives to all life, and breath, with all things.”**

The point Paul made was that there is no god that has ever been imagined or can be imagined that is greater than Jehovah God. He made everything, and he is Lord of everything. He does not dwell in any man-made temple, nor is he served by men, because he needs nothing. For it is he who gives everyone everything.

Searching for him

- **And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).**

Paul then told about the relationship of God to mankind. He said that God (1) **“made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth,”** and, (2) he **“determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy.”** And he did those things so that we would search for him. And our only chance to find him is to grope for him, even though he is not far from each one of us.

Every nation of men upon all the face of the earth came from the seed of one man, Adam. However, it was not that way before the great flood. I explain that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. Nevertheless, whether you believe what I say about Adam or not, all men after the flood did come from the seed of the one man Noah.

What Paul meant by God determining prescribed times was probably all the natural cycles of things in the world. The sun and moon cycle; the weather patterns cycle; the lives of all creatures cycle. All of such things are controlled by the times that God prescribed.

Moreover, God determined the limits of our occupancy. For example, we are limited to the material world, while God and his heavenly agents reside in the spiritual world. We are limited to our bodies of flesh. And we are limited in our knowledge. For the wise king Solomon said, **“When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is he who sees sleep with his eyes neither day nor night), then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. Because however much a man labors to seek it out, yet he shall not find it. Yea moreover, though a wise man thinks to know it, yet he shall not be able to find it”** (Ecclesiastes 8:16-17). And the more men learn the more they see how little of this vast world they know.

And God created us to search for him, continually groping to find him. And that is done primarily by continual study of his holy book the Bible. God could easily reveal himself if he so desired. He created the sun to be visible, but he keeps himself invisible. Therefore, we must search for him if we ever expect to find him. And that is true of every soul. Each one of us must personally search for God if we every expect to find him.

Although he keeps himself invisible, he is **“not far from each one of us.”** For his spirit is everywhere. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

We are his offspring

- **For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring. Being therefore offspring of God, we ought not think the Divine to be like gold, or silver, or stone handiwork of the skill and thought of man** (Acts 17:28-29).

We are the very offspring of God. We are offspring of his eternal Spirit, which means our spirits are also eternal. Our bodies were created, but our spirits came from God himself when he breathed into Adam the breath of life (see Genesis 2:7). And just as we have all inherited of the body of Adam, so also we have inherited of his eternal spirit, which was given to Adam by God at the time of Creation. There is much more to say about those things, which I do in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Since we are offspring of God, then men should not attempt to make images of him. For all such images are figments of their imagination. Moreover, such things portray God as a lifeless object, which they then worship. When in reality it is in him that we live, and move, and exist.

There is a marvelous passage of scripture in the Old Testament where the prophet Isaiah mocks those who make and worship idols, showing how ridiculous they are: **“Those who fashion a graven image are all of them vanity. And the things that they delight in shall not profit. And their own witnesses see not, nor know, that they may be put to shame. Who has fashioned a god, or molded an image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be put to shame, and the workmen. They are of men. Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up. They shall fear. They shall be put to shame together.**

“The smith *makes* an axe, and works in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with his strong arm. Yea, he is hungry, and his strength fails. He drinks no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. And he marks it out with the compasses, and shapes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He hews down cedars for him, and takes the holm tree and the oak, and strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it. Then it shall be for a man to burn. And he takes of it, and warms himself. Yea, he kindles it, and bakes bread. Yea, he makes a god, and worships it.

“He makes it a graven image, and falls down to it. He burns part of it in the fire. With part of it he eats flesh. He roasts roast, and is satisfied. Yea, he warms himself, and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. And the residue of it he makes a god, even his graven image. He falls down to it and worships, and prays to it, and says, Deliver me, for thou art my god.

“They do not know, nor do they consider. For he has shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none calls to mind, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire. Yea, I have also baked bread upon the coals of it. I have roasted flesh and eaten it. And shall I make the residue of it an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?

“He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isaiah 44:9-20).

Yet men throughout the world still fall down and worship idols. Among those who believe in Christ, the Roman Catholic Church is the worse offender. For they have images they claim to be those of Christ, of his apostles, and of other souls they revere.

Were Isaiah alive in the world today, he would no doubt also mock how men now believe in the fantastic theory of evolution. Such men truly feed on ashes, a dead theory that pollutes their minds. Their deceived hearts have turned them aside from the truth. And they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, “Is there not a lie in our right hands?” Which lie is the idea that the world and all things in it just happened by itself for no reason. And that deception has and continues to drag down people into moral and spiritual degradation.

God will judge us

- **Indeed therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands for all men everywhere to repent. Because he appointed a day during which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he appointed, having provided assurance to all men because he raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).**

God destroyed the antediluvian world because of their wickedness. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. He commanded the sons of Israel to destroy the nations of their promised land because those nations were wicked. However, he never destroyed a people just because they were idol worshipers; he overlooked their ignorance. God did punish his people Israel when they began worshiping idols. He punished them because they were not ignorant. He had warned them many times against it. For they had been his chosen people.

Paul told those Athenians that the times of ignorance were over. For **“God now commands for all men everywhere to repent.”** God’s chosen people are now those who believe and obey his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they are Hebrews or Gentiles. The times of ignorance are over because God has sent his servants out proclaiming the good news of Christ to all men.

Repentance means turning away from wrong and doing right. God gave his chosen people Israel the law of Moses. That law is filled with knowledge about that which is good and right and just. However, God gave no such information to the Gentile nations. He left them to determine for themselves what is good and right and just. But now God commands all men everywhere to repent and obey the good news of Jesus Christ, which contains the highest knowledge of that which is good and right and just.

Of course, every man is born with knowledge of the fundamentals of good and evil (although it takes a while to mature in childhood). For Paul said about our inborn conscience, **“For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news”** (Romans 2:14-16).

Paul also warned those Athenians of the great day of judgment, when God would judge the world in righteousness. God is going to judge the world righteously about their righteousness. And he is going to judge by the man he appointed, who is his Son Jesus Christ. As Paul later wrote to the Roman brothers, **“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God. So then each of us will give account about himself to God”** (Romans 14:10-12).

And God provided assurance to all men because he raised Jesus from the dead. Raising him from the dead demonstrated to us that we too will be raised from the dead (our spirits not our flesh). And the evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is conclusive because of the testimony of those who saw him. And since we are all going to be raised from the dead, we are also going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

They mocked at the resurrection

- **But when they heard the resurrection of the dead, of course they mocked, but others said, We will hear thee again about this. And so Paul departed from among them. But some men, having joined with him, believed, among whom was also Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them (Acts 17:32-34).**

Those Athenians had obviously never heard of a resurrection of the dead, the kind that Paul meant. For every resurrection that had ever been performed was always followed by the eventual death of whoever had been resurrected. Paul was referring to an enduring resurrection, one that was not followed by eventual death. Consequently, those Athenians mocked at the idea. It was just too farfetched for them to accept.

Nevertheless, there were some of them who did not mock, but wanted to hear more about it. Moreover, some of them actually joined with Paul and believed. Those were the kind of men who were Jesus' sheep. For remember Jesus said to the Jews, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:27). They were obviously men who loved righteousness, were humble and lowly, were open-minded, and were eager to learn the truth. They had the childlike spirit necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

One of them was named Dionysius, and he was an Areopagite. Remember, the Areopagus was where the highest governmental council of ancient Athens met. Therefore, Dionysius was a member of that council. And like Sergius Paulus the proconsul of Cyprus, Dionysius was no doubt **"an intelligent man"** (Acts 13:7). The text says that a woman named Damaris also believe, as well as others who had been there. There are both men and women who are attracted to the good news of Christ.

Paul abides in Corinth

- **And after these things Paul having separated from Athens, he came to Corinth. And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by origin, who recently came from Italy, and his wife Priscilla, because Claudius arranged for all the Jews to separate from Rome, he came to them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and was working, for they were of the tentmakers craft (Acts 18:1-3).**

Corinth was about fifty miles southwest of Athens. Pontus was a district in the northeast part of Asia Minor, bordering the Black Sea. Aquila and Priscilla were Jews, but they must have already been Christians, although nothing is said about their conversion. Nevertheless, they were obviously very helpful disciples, as shown in these passages from letters written by Paul:

Salute Prisca [another name for Priscilla] and Aquila my co-workmen in Christ Jesus (who laid down their own neck for my life, to whom not only I thank, but also all the congregations of the Gentiles), and the congregation associated with their house (Romans 16:3-4).

Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the congregation associated with their house (First Corinthians 16:19).

Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the house of Onesiphorus (Second Timothy 4:19).

Aquila and Priscilla not only lodged Paul, but, as one of the passages says, they risked their lives for him. Moreover, they allowed their house to be used as a place for a congregation of the Lord.

Paul was still waiting for the arrival of Silas and Timothy. He remain there and made tents to earn funds to aid his work of evangelism. (Paul had somehow acquired skill in the craft of tent-making.) Thus, lodging with Aquila and Priscilla proved a double blessing for him because Aquila was also a tentmaker.

He is opposed by the Jews

- **And he was discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath, and was persuading Jews and Greeks. And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was being held by the Spirit, fully testifying to the Jews, Jesus the Christ.**
- **But when they opposed and slandered him, having shaken out his clothes, he said to them, Your blood is upon your heads. I am clean. From henceforth I will go to the Gentiles** (Acts 18:4-6).

Even though Paul was working with Aquila making tents, he still discoursed in the synagogue every sabbath about the good news of Christ. And he was successful in persuading some of them, both Jews and their Gentile proselytes. When Silas and Timothy finally came down from Macedonia, Paul was being held by the Spirit, fully testifying to the Jews about Jesus the Christ.

Remember, just before they came to Macedonia the Spirit would not allow them to evangelize in Asia Minor (see Acts 16:7). When the passage says that Paul was held by the Spirit there, it probably means that God wanted Paul to remain there in Corinth fully testifying to the Jews until Silas and Timothy arrived.

Apparently, however, with the arrival of Silas and Timothy, the Jews there who disagreed with Paul began to oppose and slander him. And that caused Paul to shake out his clothes and announce his departure to the Gentiles. He also warned them that he was clean from their blood, which was upon their heads. He was clean because he did all he could to persuade them. He used the figure of their blood to symbolize the lives of their eternal spirits, which they were losing because they rejected the salvation of Christ.

Paul always sought to first persuade the Jews wherever he went. For he grieved greatly about their rejection of Christ (see Romans 9 where he describes his feelings about them in detail). Nevertheless remember, the Lord had called Paul to convert the Gentiles, and so he always went to them. And he virtually always had more success converting them to Christ than he did with the Jews. Indeed, the obstinacy of the Jews against Jesus remains to this day.

Many Corinthians believed

- **And having departed from there, he went into the house of a certain man named Justus, who worships God, whose house was adjoining the synagogue. And Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord with his whole household, and many of the Corinthians who heard believed, and were immersed (Acts 18:7-8).**

These things probably happened before a congregation of the church was established there. Paul had been discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath. But then he withdrew because of the hostility that developed. From what the text says, Paul went into the house of Justus because it was both conveniently located, and owned by a man allied with his work. For a man cannot worship God without accepting the good news of Christ when he hears it.

Crispus was the synagogue ruler (although probably not the only one), and both he and his household believed in the Lord Christ. Crispus may have remained the synagogue ruler after Paul separated himself from it. He may have remained, at least for a while, in order to use his influence there for the cause of Christ.

The passage also says **“many of the Corinthians who heard believed, and were immersed.”** Those believers no doubt included both Jews and Gentiles, because the earlier passage says that Paul was discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath, and was persuading them both. That may have been the time when Paul established a congregation of the Lord in Corinth, which then began meeting in the house of Aquila and Priscilla.

Notice how the passage says the Corinthians who believed were immersed. They were immersed in water for the remission of their sins. Be not deceived by men who preach salvation by faith only. For no man can be saved without having his sins remitted. And that remission comes from obedience to the command to be immersed in water. It is a simple and easy act to perform. Why risk your soul by refusing?

Jesus encourages Paul

- **And the Lord spoke to Paul by a vision at night, Fear not, but speak, and be not silent, because I am with thee, and no man will lay upon thee to harm thee, because many people are for me in this city. And he remained a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11).**

There is much foolishness now that is being taught as history. Beware of it. One example is the idea that ancient Corinth was the most wicked city of those times. The Lord would never have said there were many people for him in that city if it was that wicked. The most wicked city of those times was clearly Pompeii in Italy, which God destroyed by an eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.

Just as modern Las Vegas is the gambling capital of the world, Pompeii was the capital of the world for illicit sex. Indeed, the symbol of the city was actually a winged phallus. The ruins of the city had been buried in ashes from the local volcano for centuries. However, modern excavations revealed many pictures of their perverse sex behavior. When they

were first revealed in 1819 the pictures were so embarrassing to the king of Naples (the city near the ancient ruins) that he had them locked away in a secret place. They are now accessible only to adults.

Historians rarely mention how sinful Pompeii was. Modern historians, being disciples of the devil, want to conceal the association of the sinfulness of Pompeii with its destruction. For that is not only strong evidence that God caused it, but it is also an example to warn against such sinfulness.

Dear reader, much of what is proclaimed and published as history is nothing but man's opinion. Henry Ford once said, "History is more or less bunk." That is especially true of modern history about the Bible. Indeed, it seems from my own experience that most of it is now perverse fiction created by the enemies of God to destroy our faith. Be exceedingly discriminating in what you hear and read about Bible history. Let God's word speak for itself, and carefully research what it does not say. And the more you contrast modern history with what the Bible actually says, the more you will see how deceitful history about the Bible has become.

When the Lord said that many people were for him in that city, he did not mean there were already many disciples of Christ there. He no doubt meant that many people there loved truth and righteousness, and consequently would be receptive to the good news of Christ when they heard it. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **"And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring those also, and they will hear my voice. And there will become one flock, one shepherd"** (John 10:16).

Since there were so many people for the Lord in that city, then Paul remained a year and six months, teaching the people about the word of God. Although many people were for the Lord in Corinth, and it was not the most wicked city of that time, the church there did struggle with many spiritual problems. Paul later wrote two lengthy letters to them about those problems, copies of which we have in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the congregation in Corinth was not the only one with spiritual problems in those times. Actually, it is a rare congregation in these times that has no spiritual problems.

Jews attack Paul

- **But Gallio being proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord attacked Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This man is persuading men to worship God against the law.**
- **But when Paul was going to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, If therefore indeed it were some crime or evil reckless deed, O ye Jews, I would have tolerated you according to the matter. But if it is an issue about a word and names and the law from you, look ye yourselves, for I do not intend to be a judge of these things. And he drove them from the judgment seat (Acts 18:12-16).**

The Jews were so hostile to Jesus Christ that they even opposed Paul's efforts to convert the Gentiles. And not being able to oppose his words, they often resorted to violence. In this case they brought him to the judgment seat of Gallio, who was the proconsul of that

district. However, Gallio had no sympathy for the Jews. The Jews were considered a despicable people among the Gentiles for many reasons. Not the least of which was their readiness to quarrel about their religion. Consequently, when Gallio heard their complaint, he rebuffed them and drove them out. And you can see in his words the contempt he had for Jews.

The Greeks become violent

- **But all the Greeks, having taken Sosthenes the synagogue ruler, were beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not going to judge, even of these things** (Acts 18:17).

Remember, all Gentiles were called Greeks in the New Testament. An earlier passage said that Crispus was the synagogue ruler, while here it says Sosthenes was the synagogue ruler. Synagogues often, but not always had more than one ruler. For example, remember this passage about Paul and Barnabas being in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia: **“And after the reading of the law and the prophets the synagogue rulers sent to them, saying, Men, brothers, if there is among you a word of exhortation for the people, speak”** (Acts 13:15).

Sosthenes must have accompanied Paul to the judgment seat of Gallio, because he was also a disciple of Christ. We know that because of Paul’s salutation in his first letter to the Corinthians: **“Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother, to the congregation of God that is at Corinth, to called men, to holy men who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus with all in every place who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—both ours and theirs”** (First Corinthians 1:1-2).

Gallio would not even judge their attacks against each other. For him they were just a pack of fighting dogs. Those Greeks were probably proselytes of the Jews. Why they beat Sosthenes instead of Paul is not told. Perhaps Sosthenes stopped their prior attack of Paul by persuaded them to take him to be judged by Gallio. If that was the case, then they may have expressed their frustration by attacking Sosthenes. They also may have noticed that Gallio was not going to interfere with their attack of him. Moreover, it would have been much riskier for them to attack Paul in front of the judgment seat because Paul was a Roman citizen. And Gallio had a much greater responsibility to protect Romans.

Paul sailed to Syria

- **But Paul, who still remained considerable days with the brothers, having separated, sailed away to Syria (and with him Priscilla and Aquila), having shaved his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow** (Acts 18:18).

Even after that persecution Paul **“still remained considerable days with the brothers.”** He did not immediately flee as he had done at some other cities, because he was safe there. Remember what the Lord said to him in a vision at night: **“Fear not, but speak, and be not silent, because I am with thee, and no man will lay upon thee to harm thee,**

because many people are for me in this city.” Moreover, by remaining he could encourage the disciples there to fear not and continue the work.

Cenchrea was the eastern harbor of Corinth, about ten miles from the city. Paul was returning to Antioch of Syria. Nothing is said about the vow that Paul had. Many claim it was a Nazirite vow of the law of Moses. However, that is clearly not true. For the Nazirite vow involved many rules and regulations, including making animal sacrifices when the time of the vow was ended. And all of those animal offerings were required to be made by a priest at the altar of the tabernacle, or the temple in Jerusalem that replaced the tabernacle.

Here is the last part of the law of the Nazirite vow: **“And the Nazirite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazirite, after he has shaven his separation, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before Jehovah. This is holy for the priest, together with the wave-breast and heave-thigh. And after that the Nazirite may drink wine.**

“This is the law of the Nazirite who vows, and of his oblation to Jehovah for his separation, besides that which he is able to get. According to his vow which he vows, so he must do after the law of his separation” (Numbers 6:18-21). Obviously Paul did none of those things when he shaved his head in Cenchrea. Consequently, his vow could not have been a Nazirite vow.

The Nazirite vow was a very special vow that involved a man or a woman separating themselves to Jehovah for some purpose. However, the law also made provision for other kinds of vows. Here are the general ordinances about them:

“And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, This is the thing which Jehovah has commanded. When a man vows a vow to Jehovah, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

“Also when a woman vows a vow to Jehovah, and binds herself by a bond, being in her father’s house, in her youth, and her father hears her vow, and her bond with which she has bound her soul, and her father remains silent at her, then all her vows shall stand, and every bond with which she has bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallows her in the day that he hears, none of her vows, or of her bonds with which she has bound her soul, shall stand. And Jehovah will forgive her, because her father disallowed her.

“And if she is *married* to a husband, while her vows are upon her, or the rash utterance of her lips, with which she has bound her soul, and her husband hears it, and remains silent at her in the day that he hears it, then her vows shall stand, and her bonds with which she has bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallows her in the day that he hears it, then he shall make void her vow which is upon her, and the rash utterance of her lips, with which she has bound her soul. And Jehovah will forgive her.

“But the vow of a widow, or of her who is divorced, *even* everything with which she has bound her soul shall stand against her.

“And if she vowed in her husband’s house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath, and her husband heard it, and remained silent at her, and did not disallow her, then all her vows shall stand, and every bond with which she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband made them null and void in the day that he heard them, then whatever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand. Her husband has made them void, and Jehovah will forgive her.

“Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void. But if her husband altogether remains silent at her from day to day, then he establishes all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her. He has established them, because he remained silent at her in the day that he heard them. But if he shall make them null and void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her iniquity.

“These are the statutes, which Jehovah commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between a father and his daughter, being in her youth in her father’s house” (Numbers 30:1-16).

Paul obviously made some kind of vow that came under the law for those general kinds. The matter of shaving his head may have been a tradition the Jews later developed, or it may simply have been part of Paul’s personal vow.

While on the subject of vows, I want to contrast them with swearing an oath. An oath is a kind of guarantee about something said. Remember, Jesus condemned the use of oaths among his disciples. See my comments in Matthew 5:33-37 about what he said of them. On the other hand, vows are never condemned. And there are many examples in the Bible of righteous souls making a vow to God.

Making a vow is not a sin, but the Bible does give many warnings about keeping them, and keeping them promptly. Here is one by Solomon: **“When thou vow a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou vow. Better is it that thou should not vow, than that thou should vow and not pay. Do not allow thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, nor say thou before the agent, that is was an error. Why should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?”** (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

Regarding Aquila and Priscilla, why they came with Paul is not told. Some men have made much of the order of their names, claiming Priscilla was named first because she was more prominent and helpful to the church. It is a false and destructive teaching, and is completely unsupported by the record. For women have always been commanded to have a subordinate role in the church, as well as in the household.

Moreover, of the six times the names Aquila and Priscilla are given together, half of them have the name Aquila first, and half have the name Priscilla first. But even that has no significance, because word order in the Greek language is much less important than for the English language. Greek is an inflected language where word order has less meaning.

Consider the following passage that names Jesus first in a listing with God and the Holy Spirit: **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, is with all of you. Truly”** (Second Corinthians 13:14). That certainly could not be used as evidence that Jesus was more prominent than God the Father. Let not men use trivial things like name listings to lead you astray from clearly stated commands.

Regarding Silas and Timothy, apparently they did not accompany Paul on that journey. Indeed, nothing more is said in the New Testament about Silas. And Timothy is only mentioned twice more in the text of Acts. However, Timothy is mentioned in ten of the thirteen letters that Paul wrote in the New Testament.

He goes for the feast at Jerusalem

- **And he came to Ephesus and left behind those there, but having entered into the synagogue himself, he discoursed with the Jews. And when they asked him to remain on more time with them, he did not consent, but separated from them, having said, I must definitely keep the coming feast at Jerusalem, but I will return again to you, God willing. And he launched from Ephesus** (Acts 18:19-21).

Ephesus is on the west coast of Asia Minor, about two hundred and fifty miles due east of Corinth across the Aegean Sea. The words about Paul coming to Ephesus and leaving behind those there must refer to Aquila and Priscilla. And from the other words of the text it appears that they did not become involved with the synagogue. For the words suggest that Paul was the one who entered the synagogue and discoursed with the Jews.

Paul must have been well received in the synagogue, because they asked him to remain more time with them. However, Paul declined, telling them he needed to keep the coming feast at Jerusalem. Which feast that was is not told. Therefore, there are differences of opinion about it. The law of Moses required every male of the sons of Israel to attend three specially designated feasts each year. That command was given several times.

Here is one example: **“Three times thou shalt keep a feast to me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread (Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in it thou came out from Egypt, and none shall appear before me empty), and the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labors, which thou sow in the field, and the feast of ingathering at the end of the year, when thou gather in thy labors out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the lord Jehovah”** (Exodus 23:14-17). I describe each of those feasts in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Of course, when an Israelite became a Christian, he was no longer bound to keep all the commandments of the law of Moses. Nevertheless, Paul still obeyed many of them; those that were still in effect for the Jews who were citizens of the land of Israel.

Although Paul declined to remain with the Jews in Ephesus, he did say he would return again to them, God willing.

Going to many places

- **And after coming down to Caesarea, having gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after spending some time, he departed, passing through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, successively, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:22-23).**

Remember, Caesarea was a major seaport on the Mediterranean sea about forty miles northwest of Jerusalem. Antioch of Syria was the city of Paul's home congregation. It was almost three hundred miles north of Caesarea, and about fifteen miles east of the coast. The record says that Paul went up and greeted the church. That has been commonly interpreted as saying he went to the church in Jerusalem, which was where the apostles were based. Evidence for that is the expression about going up. In the New Testament journeys involving Jerusalem always refer to either going *up to* Jerusalem or going *down from* Jerusalem.

How long Paul stayed in Jerusalem and at Antioch is not told. It was probably not very long, because the passage immediately begins to describe what is called his third missionary journey. Remember, Galatia and Phrygia were districts in Asia Minor with cities where Paul had established many congregations. He traveled from one to the other **"strengthening all the disciples."** The passage does not say he established new congregations at that time. Apparently his primary purpose was to strengthen the disciples in those he had already established.

Apollos teaches about the Lord

- **Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by origin, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the scriptures. This was a man who was instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in the Spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things about the Lord, knowing only the immersion of John. And this man began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside, and expounded to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-26).**

Not much is known about Apollos except what is told here. He was (1) a Jew originally from Alexandria in Egypt, (2) he was an eloquent man, (3) he was mighty in the scriptures, meaning the Old Testament, (4) he was instructed in the way of the Lord, and (5) he was speaking and teaching accurately the things of the Lord. However, he only knew the immersion of John.

Regarding the reputation of Apollos in the churches, in Paul's first letter to the congregation in Corinth he rebuked them for having envy, strife, and divisions, saying to them, **"I gave you milk to drink and not solid food, for ye were not yet able. But not even yet are ye able, for ye are still carnal. For whereas among you is envy and strife and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk according to man?"**

"For while one may say, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who therefore is Paul and who is Apollos? But rather helpers through whom ye

believed, even as the Lord gave to each man. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused growth. So then neither is he who plants anything, nor he who waters, but God who causes growth" (First Corinthians 3:2-7). That shows how great a reputation Apollos had, because the disciples at Corinth ranked him as high as they did Paul.

Regarding Paul's goal in his work with the churches, he had great pride in establishing congregations of Christ in many places. Planting them seems to have been his greatest goal. And he rejoiced that other men took pride in strengthening and helping the growth of them. He planted and they watered. Paul certainly spent time strengthening and encouraging the churches, but not extensively. For he said in his letter to the brothers in Rome, **"And thus having aspired to proclaim the good news not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build upon a foundation belonging to another man ..."** (Romans 15:20).

Paul accepted Apollos being ranked equally with him, and he told how they worked together, each of them having different goals in the churches. Nevertheless, Paul always put the Lord above everyone.

Since Apollos knew only the immersion of John, then Aquila and Priscilla **"took him aside, and expounded to him the way of God more accurately."** Notice they did not confront him publicly. It is much wiser and courteous to confront privately, whenever it is possible. Too often public confrontations arouse defensiveness and ill feelings.

Much is made by this generation about Aquila and Priscilla both expounding to Apollo the way of God more accurately. Many have used that passage to justify women teaching men, which Paul condemned by a direct command, when he said, **"Let a woman learn in silence in all subjection. But I do not allow a woman to teach, nor to have authority of a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, having been deceived, became in transgression"** (First Timothy 2:11-14).

Women are to teach their children and each other, not men. For Paul said to Titus, **"Aged women likewise be reverent in behavior, not slanderous, not enslaved to much wine, teachers of what is good, so that they may admonish the young women to be sensible, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be serious-minded, pure, homemakers, good, submissive to their own husbands, so that the word of God may not be blasphemed"** (Titus 2:3-5).

Priscilla was merely assisting her husband in giving information to Apollos. Privates in the Army are not teachers of generals. Enlisted men often convey information to their officers, but they are never given the authority to be their teachers. At least that was the way it was when I was in the US Navy. But regardless of how perverse the world can become, women in the church are not allowed **"to teach, nor to have authority of a man."** Our Christian schools sin when they appoint women as teachers of classes containing adult male students. Let not the perversity of this generation lead you astray to sin with them.

Apollos goes to Achaia

- **And when he intended to pass through into Achaia, the brothers wrote, having encouraged the disciples to receive him, who, when he arrived,**

assisted much those who believed through the grace. For he forcibly refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the scriptures Jesus to be the Christ (Acts 18:27-28).

Remember, Achaia was the district containing Athens and Corinth. Apollos was a mighty servant of the Lord, assisting much those who believed through the grace. It is by the grace of God that we have all our blessings. Apollos greatly assisted those who believed, because he forcibly refuted the Jews in public. He refuted them forcibly because he used the scriptures (of the Old Testament) to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ.

Our most powerful weapon for truth is the Holy Bible. For Paul said the word of God was **“the sword of the Spirit”** (Ephesians 6:17). Swords are used to combat and defeat mortal enemies. And all who oppose the good news of Christ are our mortal enemies. For they threaten the lives of our divine spirits with the living death of hell. God spoke of hell to John in his vision of heaven, when he said to him, **“But for the cowards, and unbelieving, and sinful, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”** (Revelation 21:8). The lake of fire is hell.

Notice how that passage says the unbelieving will have their part in the lake of fire with all the wicked sinners. (The lake of fire is also called the second death.) And the enemies of the good news of Christ would destroy our faith, causing us to be cast into hell. They are our mortal enemies and must be combated and defeated with the mighty **“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** And whoever discourages you from trusting and using the Bible is your mortal enemy. Therefore, it is vital to develop your skill with that powerful weapon of the Spirit.

Disciples of John are re-immersed

- **And it came to pass while Apollos was at Corinth, for Paul, having passed through the upper regions, to come to Ephesus. And having found some disciples, he said to them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said to him, But we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit. And he said to them, Into what then were ye immersed? And they said, Into John’s immersion.**
- **And Paul said, John indeed immersed an immersion of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus, the Christ. And when they heard this, they were immersed in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5).**

Paul first asked those men if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. But they replied they had not even heard there was a Holy Spirit. They obviously believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they were disciples of John the immerser. Paul then asked them into what they had been immersed. For John immersed only for repentance, and then he taught that the people should believe in Jesus the Christ who was coming after him.

Those men at Ephesus were disciples of John and they believed in Jesus. However, they had not been fully instructed about the good news of Christ, which includes knowledge

about the existence of the Holy Spirit. For Jesus commanded that we be immersed into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As he said to his apostles just before his ascension into heaven, **“After going, make ye disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...”** (Matthew 28:19).

When those men heard that their immersion was not sufficient to be disciples of Christ, they did not argue or resist. They were immersed again, but this time in the name of the Lord Jesus. Notice how that story emphasized the importance of being properly immersed in order to become disciples of Christ. Yet most modern believers dismiss the rite of immersion as being unnecessary. Those men at Ephesus obviously had the right kind of spirit to be worthy of the good news of Christ. Those who claim to believe but refuse proper immersion are showing themselves unworthy.

Paul laid hands on them

- **And Paul having laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve** (Acts 19:6-7).

Laying hands on someone was done for various purposes. One purpose was to seize a man, as used in this passage: **“So there became a division among the multitude because of him. And some of them wanted to take him, but no man laid hands on him”** (John 7:43-44).

Another purpose of laying on hands was to share or bestow some kind of blessing, sometimes involving supernatural powers. However, such things varied greatly. Consider for example this passage about Jesus: **“And they brought children to him, so that he would touch them. ... And having embraced them, while laying his hands upon them, he blessed them”** (Mark 10:13, 16). How they were blessed is not told. It may have been something like good health and a long life. However, we do not think of those things as being any more supernatural than the protection God gives us when we ask him for it in our prayers.

The most frequent use of laying on of hands by the apostles was to bestow some kinds of supernatural powers, which were called gifts of the Holy Spirit. And that is what happened with those former disciples of John. They received from Paul the ability to speak in foreign languages (tongues) never learned and to prophesy. They received those things from Paul because he was an apostle, and only the apostles had that power. I speak much more about the Holy Spirit and his gifts in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Why the passage says the men were *about* twelve is not clear. The only lesson I can see is that even though Luke, the author of this book, was inspired by the Holy Spirit in his writing to make no errors, he was not given the power to remember or to know every detail about everything that happened. Hence, he could only remember the approximate number of how many men there were. What Luke wrote was sufficient for what God wanted us to know about the growth and development of the early church.

Paul discourses daily in a school

- **And after entering into the synagogue, he spoke boldly for three months, discoursing and persuading the things about the kingdom of God.**
- **But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, having withdrawn from them, he separated the disciples, discoursing daily in the school of a certain Tyrannus. And this happened for two years, so as for all those dwelling in Asia to hear the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:8-10).**

Paul was allowed to speak in the synagogue at Ephesus for three months, discoursing and persuading the things about the kingdom of God. However, as almost always happened, opposition to him grew by those who were hardened and disobedient to the point that they spoke evil of the Way before the multitude. Paul withdrew rather than waste time in a verbal brawl with his enemies there, because obviously the multitude of Jews did not support him. Consequently, Paul took the disciples and discoursed daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years.

That opposition in the synagogue did not stop the effectiveness of Paul's preaching. For the text says that as a result all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles. Remember, Asia was a province in the western part of what we now call Asia Minor, and Ephesus was its capital. What is called Asia in modern times is what was formerly called the Far East or the latin word Orient.

The inhabitants of Asia probably heard the good news of Christ either when they visited Ephesus or by learning of it from those who went out from the city. News in those ancient times was mostly by word of mouth, but it still could spread. And the word of the Lord Jesus was certainly worthy of hearing about.

Nothing is said about what was generally taught at the school of Tyrannus. It may have simply been a place where instructors rented space to earn money teaching whatever subject they had knowledge about. Paul no doubt taught there without charge. The congregation at Ephesus probably paid whatever costs were charge by the school.

He does extraordinary miracles

- **And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so as to even bring handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin to those who were incapacitated and to free their infirmities from them, and the evil spirits to go out from them (Acts 19:11-12).**

Notice how the text says that God was doing the miracles. He is the source of all miracles, because nobody else can perform them without God giving them the power. And he only gave righteous souls that power. The devil can do mighty things, but he cannot do miracles. Like men, the devil can only operate in the realm of natural law. Therefore, Paul's ability to do those extraordinary miracles was undeniable proof that he was serving Almighty God, the only true and living God.

God gave both Peter and Paul extraordinary powers to perform signs and wonders in his name. For remember, the record says about Peter, **“And more who believe were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so as to bring the feeble to the thoroughfares, and to place them on cots and mats, so that while coming, the shadow of Peter might at the least overshadow some of them”** (Acts 5:14-15).

The shadow of Peter probably had healing powers. And the above passage in Acts says that even handkerchiefs and aprons from the skin of Paul had the power to heal. Those were such rare powers they may even have been given only to Peter and Paul. For there is nothing in the Bible about any other men with such capabilities, except for Jesus Christ himself. For no man ever came close to his mighty powers.

Ever since the time of Jesus and his apostles many other men have claimed to have great power to perform miracles of healing. Believe them not! God gave those gifts of the Holy Spirit only during the time when the New Testament scriptures were being written. Now that we have the Bible such miracles no longer happen, because the word of God is sufficient to develop faith.

We do not need miracles to verify the authenticity of the good news of Christ. Reject and rebuke every man who makes such claims. They are disciples of the devil, regardless of how pious they sound and act. For at best they are skilled illusionists who aggrandize themselves and are leading many souls astray.

Some Jewish exorcists

- **But some of the wandering Jewish exorcists, attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And there were some sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, seven doing this.**
- **And having answered, the evil spirit said, I know Jesus and I recognize Paul, but who are ye? And the man in whom was the evil spirit, leaping on them, and having overpowered them, he prevailed against them, so as for them to flee out of that house naked and wounded** (Acts 19:13-16).

During the time of Jesus the Jews practiced exorcism. Remember one of the things that Jesus said to the Pharisees who accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub: **“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Because of this they will be your judges”** (Matthew 12:27). I say much more about evil spirits in my book *Becoming Son of God for Eternity*.

Those wandering Jews were probably practicing exorcism for the money they could charge. Moreover, they were obviously not believers in Jesus as the Christ. They were no doubt just opportunists, who, when they learned about the successes of Paul, decided to use his technique. Not being believers, however, caused their effort to backfire upon them. For it just provoked the evil spirit to attack them.

Those wandering Jews were sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest. Remember however, all of the descendants of Aaron were of the family of high priests. Hence, Sceva may not have

actually served in the office of High Priest, because by that time in their history there were too many men of that family for them all to have served.

That story became well known

- **And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, to those who dwell at Ephesus. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified (Acts 19:17).**

I find that story very amusing. Paul and the other disciples may also have found it amusing, although the record does not say. It does say that fear fell upon the people of Ephesus, both Jews and Gentiles. It also says the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, and that also included both Jews and Gentiles. And the next passage suggests that many unbelievers were converted to Christ because of it.

Turning away from magic

- **And many of those who have believed came, confessing, and reporting their practices. And a considerable number of those who practiced magical things, having brought their books together, burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. Thus the word of the Lord was growing mightily and was prevailing (Acts 19:18-20).**

One result of that story was to cause many of the people who believed to report their practices and confess their sins. The practices they reported were not described. They may have included many of the sinful habits they had developed. For many of those who practiced magical things brought their books together and burned them publicly.

There were so many of those books that their monetary value totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver, which was a huge amount of money. Remember, the thirty pieces of silver given to Judas for betraying Jesus was able to purchase a potters field to bury foreigners (see Matthew 27:7). Fifty thousand is over sixteen hundred times that amount.

Those things reveal how extensively magic was practiced and believed. And that large turning away from the practice of magical things caused the word of the Lord to grow mightily and prevail. For the word of the Lord is based upon truth and righteousness.

This sinful generation of Americans now condemns all book burning, regardless of how evil the books are. Be not led astray with them, because there are many kinds of literature that are so evil and filthy they deserve only burning. Otherwise they poison minds and spawn all kinds of evils. Their effects on our souls is like the effects of rotten food and poison to our stomachs. Many strict laws have been passed to combat and eliminate toxic things from our bodies, but nothing is done to combat things that can poison our minds. Therefore, as our physical health has improved, so also our spiritual health is declining.

Paul decides to go to Jerusalem

- **Now when these things were fulfilled, Paul decided in the spirit, after passing through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, having said, After becoming there, I must also see Rome. And having sent into Macedonia two of those who help him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while (Acts 19:21-22).**

Paul had been to Macedonia and Achaia on his second missionary journey, where he had established congregations. And he always liked to return so that he could encourage them and strengthen their faith. For example, when he was describing all of the afflictions he had suffered, he said, **“Besides the external things, crowding upon me daily is the care of all the congregations”** (Second Corinthians 11:28).

It was within his own spirit that he made that decision. It was not a command of the Holy Spirit. For God has given us much freedom to decide for ourselves what to do about many things, as long as they are good and right.

After visiting the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul planned to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. Apparently in preparation for his return to Macedonia, Paul sent two of his helpers ahead of him while he remained in Asia for a while. Timothy was sent with Erastus. The New Testament record mentions Timothy many times. He was perhaps the most helpful of all those who had worked with Paul. At least that is the impression given by the words of the New Testament.

That passage in Acts is the first mention of Erastus, but he is mentioned in two of Paul's letters: Romans 16:23 and Second Timothy 4:20. In Paul's letter to the Romans he spoke of Erastus as **“the manager of the city.”** However, the city is not identified. Indeed, some men doubt the Erastus mentioned in the Roman letter was the same man sent to Macedonia with Timothy. For it would seem to have been difficult for the manager of a city to serve Paul that way. Unless, of course, the man held that position at some other time.

Why Paul remained in Asia is also not told. Notice the passage does not say that Paul remained in Ephesus. Hence, he may have wanted to remain in Asia so that he could visit other congregations there while Timothy and Erastus were preparing for him to come to Macedonia and Achaia. There are many such trivial details that are not included in the scriptures.

A silversmith speaks against Paul

- **And about that time there developed no small stir about the Way. For a certain silversmith named Demetrius who makes silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little work to the craftsmen, to whom also (having assembled the workmen about such things) he said, Men, ye know that our prosperity is from this work. And ye see and hear, that not only at Ephesus, but almost in all Asia, this man Paul, having persuaded them, turned away a considerable multitude, saying that there are no gods made by hands.**

- **And not only is this our part liable to come into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Artemis is going to be regarded for nothing, and also her magnificence be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship (Acts 19:23-27).**

Demetrius was a silversmith who was primarily concerned about his livelihood of making and selling silver shrines of Artemis, a Greek goddess. And Paul was preaching against idolatry. And, like the Jews who opposed Paul, not being able to defeat Paul with reason, he decided to arouse the other craftsmen against him. He argued that (1) their prosperity was from that work, (2) Paul was persuading many against believing in idols, (3) the workmen of them would come into disrepute, and (4) the temple of the goddess Artemis would be regarded for nothing and her magnificence would be destroyed.

Demetrius claimed that all Asia and the world worshiped Artemis. There was probably some truth to that claim, because the temple of Artemis in Ephesus is listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. That list was first compiled in 225 BC by a Greek named Philo of Byzantium, which was over two centuries before Paul.

Demetrius was not the only craftsman that opposed Paul. For in his second letter to Timothy, Paul spoke of a coppersmith who opposed him: **“Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to me. May the Lord repay him according to his works, of whom thou also beware, for he extremely opposed our words. At my first defense no man came with me, but all forsook me. May it not be reckoned to them.**

“But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the sacred message might be brought to fullness, and all the Gentiles might hear. And I was rescued out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will rescue me from every evil work, and will save me for his heavenly kingdom, to whom is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly” (Second Timothy 4:14-18).

Nothing more is said in the Bible about Alexander the coppersmith, or the trial that Paul had to endure because of that man’s opposition. Remember, the Bible is a very condensed book, and there is no doubt that many other things happened in the lives of men like Peter and Paul that were never recorded.

The city was filled with confusion

- **And when they heard this, having become full of wrath, they cried out, saying, The great Artemis of Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with the confusion. And they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, traveling companions of Paul. And when Paul wanted to enter in to the crowd, the disciples did not let him. And also some of the Asian officers, being their friends, having sent to him, implored him not to give himself into the theatre.**
- **Indeed therefore some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was confused, and most had not seen why they had come together. And they urged forward Alexander out of the multitude, having put him forward from the Jews. And Alexander having waved his hand, wanted to make a**

defense to the crowd. But after recognizing that he was a Jew, one voice developed from them all, crying out for about two hours, The great Artemis of Ephesians (Acts 19:28-34).

The shouts of those silversmiths was like starting a fire, because it caused the whole city to be filled with confusion. That kind of mass hysteria is common for a people that are poorly civilized. Riots are nothing but infantile tantrums. And only a nation of weak character tolerates and rewards them. The world had such undisciplined people in those days and the world has them now. Indeed, there are certain neighborhoods in America where the people are easily provoked to riot, while there are other neighborhoods where rioting by the residents would almost be unthinkable.

Devout Muslims are especially prone to riot. Poorly disciplined young men are also more prone to riot. It is an especially pathetic commentary on the leaders of a people when they themselves can be provoked to riot. That happened once when Paul was being accused before the Roman governor. Here is that story: **“And when he [Paul] said this, there developed a conflict of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the group was divided.**

“For in fact Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there developed a great clamor. And some of the scholars of the Pharisees part having risen, they argued vehemently, saying, We find nothing wrong in this man. But if a spirit spoke to him, or an agent, we should not fight against God.

“And a great conflict having developed, the chief captain, having been alarmed lest Paul might be torn apart by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from the midst of them, and bring him into the fort” (Acts 23:7-10).

The Jews rioted even more hysterically when Paul had been in the temple. Here is part of that story: **“And they heard him [Paul] until this word. And they lifted up their voice, saying, Away with such a man from the earth, for he is not fit to live. And of them crying out, and throwing off their garments, and casting dust into the air ...” (Acts 22:22-23).** Their behavior was pure savagery, restrained only by fear of the Romans who were guarding Paul.

In that riot at Ephesus, a man named Alexander was put forward to address the crowd and make a defense. However, when he motioned for their attention the crowd refused to listen, but instead created an uproar for about two hours, shouting praise to their goddess, saying, “The great Artemis of Ephesians.”

A modern example of that very thing is the common response of believers in Mohammed. When they riot they continually shout “Allah akbar,” which is Arabic for “Allah is great.” Allah is their god, just as Artemis was the goddess of those ancient Ephesians. And it is a great insult to Jehovah God to claim that he is the same as Allah, which deceit is very common in pagan America. Never claim Allah is the same as the Almighty God of the Bible.

I think it is significant that the crowd responded that way when they recognized Alexander was a Jew. Remember, the Jews had a very bad reputation among Gentiles. Part of the reason was no doubt because they condemned idolatry and other gods. Hence, when the mob saw a Jew trying to speak to them, that probably only added fuel to their rage.

Gaius and Aristarchus are mentioned affectionately in some of Paul's letters. However, a man named Alexander who was mentioned later in one of Paul's letters was severely criticized. Paul said in that letter, **"This command I set before thee, child Timothy, according to the prophecies leading the way for thee, so that by them thou might war the good warfare. Holding faith and a good conscience, which some, having put away, made shipwreck about the faith, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan, so that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme"** (First Timothy 1:18-20). Whether those two men were the same is not known.

The town clerk rebukes the crowd

- **And when the town clerk calmed the multitude, he says, Ephesian men, now who is the man who does not know the city of the Ephesians being temple-guardian of the great goddess Artemis, and of what fell from Zeus? Therefore these things being undeniable, ye ought to be restrained, and do nothing rash. For ye brought these men, who are neither sacrilegious nor blaspheming your goddess** (Acts 19:35-37).

After two hours of fanatical shouting in praise of their god that mob was ready to hear the town clerk speak to them. He first used a rhetorical question to tell them that everybody knows their city was the temple-guardian of what he said was the "great goddess" Artemis and of what fell from Zeus. His comment about what fell from Zeus probably refers to some kind of impressive meteorite that fell from the sky in their vicinity. Since they believed that object fell from Zeus, it was probably also housed in their temple. Zeus (also called Jove or Jupiter) was supposedly the supreme god of ancient Greek mythology. A popular expletive when I was younger was, "By Jove." Beware of such things.

The town clerk, having reminded the mob of those things he urged them to be restrained and do nothing rash. Essentially (but expressed diplomatically) he said their behavior was wild, reckless, and irrational, which was certainly true.

He also said their behavior was unjust, because the men they were accusing were not guilty. They were neither sacrilegious nor had they blasphemed their goddess. When Demetrius said that Paul taught there were no gods made by hands that was indeed true. However, that was not considered blasphemy against their idols. Obviously their meaning of blasphemy was more like insulting and cursing, rather than simply denying or teaching against, which is what Paul was doing.

When Christians deny the claims of Mohammed, and teach against Mohammedanism (now popularly called Islam), we are not blaspheming that religion. Yet many Moslems react just like those ancient Ephesians did; they act wild, reckless, irrational, and unjust. And the enemies of Christ are now rewarding that kind of extortion by (1) suppressing our teaching, and (2) giving Moslems special recognition and privileges. That ancient town clerk was more courageous and righteous than many of our modern rulers.

He urges them to be lawful

- **Indeed therefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen with him, have a matter against any man, forums are brought, and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse each other. And if ye seek anything about other things, it will be decided in the assembly within law. For we are also in danger to be accused about the uproar today, there being no cause about which we can give account of this commotion. And having said these things, he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:38-41).**

Demetrius knew he did not have a legal cause against Paul, which is why he resorted to violence. That was also the typical behavior of the Jews who opposed Paul. And that kind of action is still used against Christians, especially against those who are the most active in promoting the genuine good news of Christ. Nevertheless, our enemies use many devices against us. Including slander, false teachings, and legal maneuvering.

The town clerk finally warned the crowd about charges that could be brought against them. For remember, those countries were all part of the Roman empire, and maintaining order was very high on their priorities. And the Romans could be very ruthless against communities where order was disturbed. Notice how the town clerk included himself as being in danger. For apparently it was primarily his responsibility to maintain order.

Paul departs for Macedonia

- **And after the uproar ceased, Paul having summoned the disciples and having embraced them, he departed to go into Macedonia. And having passed through those parts, and having exhorted them with many words, he came into Greece. And having spent three months there, and a conspiracy having developed against him by Jews, intending to go up into Syria, a decision developed to return through Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3).**

Paul often departed a city where the opposition to him either became violent or there was the danger of it. Nevertheless, before departing from wherever he was, Paul usually took time to bid farewell to the disciples there, whether he had been attacked by the enemies of Christ or not.

A journey from Ephesus north to Macedonia and then south to Greece would have been about eight hundred miles. The travel time alone would have taken several weeks, much of which was overland. Regarding Macedonia, remember, there were several cities in that district where Paul had established congregations of Christ, including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Since the text says that Paul **“exhorted them with many words,”** that indicates he spent his time with the disciples. Although he may also have done some evangelizing.

Remember, both Athens and Corinth were in Greece. The text does not say how long Paul spent in Macedonia, but it does say he spent three month in Greece. However, as often happened, the Jews conspired against him. And those conspiracies almost always led to violence or the danger of it. Therefore, Paul decided to depart before that could happen.

Several men went with him

- **And there accompanied him as far as Asia, Sopater a Berean, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius a Derbean, and Timothy, and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4).**

The previous passage says that Paul intended to go back to Syria. Remember, Antioch of Syria was his home congregation. However, the text says that a decision develop to return through Macedonia. That wording implies the decision was a joint one, which is further supported by the text listing seven men who accompanied him as far as Asia.

Sopater was from Berea of Macedonia, but he is not mentioned again in the scriptures. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica of Macedonia, and he was one of the men who had been seized by the crowd during the riot about Artemis. The record also says that he was with Paul on the voyage when Paul was sent to Rome to appeal Caesar: **“And when it was determined for us to sail for Italy, they delivered both Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the band of Augustus. And having gotten on a ship of Adramyttium that was going to sail to the places along Asia, we launched, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us”** (Acts 27:1-2).

Aristarchus is also mentioned in two of Paul’s letters: **“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner salutes you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom ye received orders, if he comes to you, welcome him) ...”** (Colossians 4:10), and, **“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes thee, and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my co-workmen”** (Philemon 1:23-24). Secundus was also from Thessalonica, but neither is he mentioned again in the scriptures.

Gaius was from Derby of Pisidia in Asia Minor. He was the other man who had been seized by the crowd during the riot about Artemis. He is also mentioned in two of Paul’s letters: **“I Tertius, the man who transcribed the letter, salute you in the Lord. Gaius my host, and of the whole congregation, salutes you. Erastus, the manager of the city, salutes you, and Quartus the brother”** (Romans 16:22-23), and, **“I thank God that I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest some man should say that I immersed in my name”** (First Corinthians 1:14-15).

The apostle John also addressed one of his three letters that are included in the New Testament to Gaius: **“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth”** (Third John 1:1). That may have been another man but I doubt it.

Regarding Timothy, remember, he was from Lystra of Pisidia in Asia Minor, and the record indicates he was the most helpful of all of Paul’s companions. Remember also, Timothy is mentioned in ten of the thirteen letters that Paul wrote in the New Testament. And two of those letters were personal ones to Timothy himself.

Tychicus was from the district of Asia in Asia Minor, and he is mentioned in four of Paul’s letters:

But that ye also may know the things concerning me, what I do, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord, will make known all things to you. Whom I sent to you for this same thing, so that ye might know the things about us, and that he might encourage your hearts (Ephesians 6:21-22).

Tychicus will make known to you all things about me, the beloved brother and faithful helper and fellow bondman in the Lord. Whom I sent to you for this same thing, so that he may know the things about you, and may encourage your hearts, with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother who is of you. They will make known to you all things here (Colossians 4:7-9).

Hurry to come to me quickly, for Demas forsook me having loved the present age, and he went to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Having taken Mark, bring him with thee, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I sent to Ephesus (Second Timothy 4:9-12).

When I will send Artemas to thee, or Tychicus, be diligence to come to me in Nicopolis, for I have decided to winter there. Help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way diligently, so that nothing may be lacking for them (Titus 3:12-13).

Trophimus was also from Asia, He is also mentioned as having been in Jerusalem during the time Paul was arrested there and eventually sent to Rome: **“And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and threw hands on him, crying out, Men, Israelites, help. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place. And besides he also brought Greeks into the temple, and has defiled this holy place. For they were men who saw Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they supposed that Paul brought into the temple” (Acts 21:27-29).**

Trophimus is mentioned in only one of Paul’s letters: **“Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the house of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left being sick at Miletus” (Second Timothy 4:19-20).**

Going ahead of Paul

- **These men, who went ahead, awaited us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to them at Troas within five days, where we stayed seven days (Acts 20:5-6).**

Remember, Troas was a seaport in the northwest part of Asia. It was about a hundred forty miles southeast of Philippi across the Aegean sea. Although those traveling companions had gone ahead to Troas, notice how the text uses the plural us and we when referring to what Paul did. Since Luke wrote this book that indicates he remained with Paul.

The days of unleavened bread referred to the time of the Passover feast. The law of Moses says that feast was always to be held in Jerusalem: **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Jehovah thy God, for in the month of Abib Jehovah thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. And thou shall sacrifice the Passover to Jehovah thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which Jehovah shall choose to cause his name to dwell there.**

“Thou shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days thou shall eat unleavened bread with it, even the bread of affliction, for thou came forth out of the land of Egypt in haste, that thou may remember the day when thou came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. And there shall be no leaven seen with thee in all

thy borders seven days. Neither shall any of the flesh, which thou sacrifice the first day at evening, remain all night until the morning.

“Thou may not sacrifice the Passover within any of thy gates, which Jehovah thy God gives thee, but at the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose to cause his name to dwell in, there thou shall sacrifice the Passover at evening, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou came forth out of Egypt. And thou shall roast and eat it in the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose, and thou shall turn in the morning, and go to thy tents. Six days thou shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to Jehovah thy God. Thou shall do no work” (Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

Jerusalem was the place that Jehovah chose to cause his name to dwell there. Therefore, the Passover could only be observed lawfully there. Why then did Paul tarry during those days? It could not have been because he observed that feast at Philippi. It may have been so as not to offend the Jews. For they now observe that feast wherever they are, and that tradition may have already been established.

Jews now observe that feast unlawfully in their own “gates.” Nevertheless, if Paul had traveled during those days it would have alienated the Jews and made it almost impossible for him to have any more credibility with them. Therefore, Paul avoided offending them unnecessarily. Remember, the unbelieving Jews also worship God unlawfully when they deny Jesus Christ. And just because people do some things unlawfully before God does not mean we should not try to convert them when they give us an opportunity. And if we offend them unnecessarily we lose those opportunities. Of course, under no circumstances should we ever sin against God.

Nevertheless remember, that explanation for why Paul tarried is only a possibility because the text does not explain it.

On the first day of the week

- **And upon the first day of the week, the disciples having come together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow** (Acts 20:7).

After arriving at Troas, Paul stayed seven days. At the end of which he met with the disciples who had come together to break bread, during which time he discoursed with them.

Many Christians have used that passage to claim we are commanded to meet every first day of the week to observe the Lord’s supper. Those Christians mean well, but they are like the Jews who added more commands to the law of Moses. For there is no such command in the New Testament. Supporters of that command say that the above example is sufficient for us to consider it binding. It is not.

The Jews had established the tradition of meeting in their synagogues on the seventh day of the week, the sabbath day. Apparently, using that example those early Christians created their own tradition of meeting on the first day of the week. For that was the day the Lord rose from the dead. And now some Christians believe strongly that the first day of

the week should be observed like the sabbath day, a day of rest, besides being a day of worship.

The first day of the week is also now called the Lord's day. However, there is only one passage in the entire Bible with the words "the Lord's day." That passage says, **"I John, your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Christ Jesus, happened to be on the isle that is called Patmos because of the word of God, and because of the testimony of Jesus Christ. I became in spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a great voice like a trumpet ..."** (Revelation 1:9-10).

That day is never defined. It is only a tradition to call it the first day of the week. For that day could just as well have been some other day, such as the day of his birth, the day of his resurrection, or the day of his ascension. Nevertheless, those traditions about the first day of the week are now considered obligatory by most believers. However, they err in thinking the good news of Christ is a legal system.

We are not under a legal system with God. We have been given liberty, a law of liberty. As James said, **"So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty"** (James 2:12). And Paul said, **"For ye, brothers, were called to liberty, only not liberty for an opportunity to the flesh, but be servants to each other through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself"** (Galatians 5:13-14). I speak much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Nevertheless, the Bible does not condemn all traditions, because they can be very useful. For example, it is a tradition for the Jews to assemble in synagogues on the sabbath day to worship God and study his word. Jesus and the apostles used that tradition as an opportunity to teach about the good news of Christ. Traditions are condemned when they are called commands of God. And that is what has happened to the tradition of worshiping God on the first day of the week. That tradition is a good one, a very good and beneficial one, but calling it a command of God is not. And the same is true of when to observe the Lord's supper.

Notice how the passage in Acts says that Paul discoursed with them. Another tradition that has developed is that, when the congregation assembles, one man is paid to do the preaching, which man is either called the priest, the pastor, the minister, or the preacher. However, the Greek word for discoursed means to discuss or to reason with, which implies an dialogue not the traditional monologue. I also speak more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

A young man falls

- **And he prolonged the word until midnight. And there were considerable lights in the upper floor where we were gathered together. And a certain young man named Eutychus sitting in the window, being carried away by deep sleep (Paul discoursing on more), being carried away by sleep, he fell down below from the third floor, and was taken up dead** (Acts 20:7-9).

That passage indicates their meeting was on the third floor of a building. Apparently the young man was sitting on the ledge of an open window, and as he went into the deep sleep

he fell over backwards down to the ground level. That meant he fell down three stories. What was the exact distance of the fall is not told, nor are we told what kind of surface he fell upon. Nevertheless, the fall was so severe that the text says he was taken up dead. Whether that means he was actually dead, or simply appeared dead is not told. But the next passage strongly suggests the boy was dead.

The upper room where the meeting had assembled must have been crowded. That was probably the reason the young man was sitting on the ledge of the window. Indeed, he may have been asked to sit there, so that there would be more room for the older people who would have had more difficulty sitting on a ledge.

It is understandable that the young man became drowsy, because the time was midnight. And remember how difficult it was for the apostles to remain awake in the night of Jesus' betrayal. Of course, the discourse with Paul would have given the disciples something to attend to, which would have helped them resist drowsiness. Actually, it may have been their attention to Paul that made them fail to notice how drowsy the young man was becoming.

Regarding the time and place of that gathering, we are no more justified to use that example as a command for us to always meet on the first day of the week to break bread, than it is to say we must always meet in a building on the third floor with considerable lights. We are under the law of liberty, and are free to determine the time and place of our gatherings. The traditional Sunday meeting is good to have, but it was never commanded, and should not be considered binding.

Paul revives him

- **But Paul having come down, he fell on him, and having embraced him he said, Be not troubled, for his life is in him (Acts 20:10).**

The record does not describe the injuries of the boy. However, the fact that Paul fell upon the boy and embraced him suggests his injuries were fatal. Here is a description of how the prophet Elisha restored the life of a boy: **“And when Elisha came into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed to Jehovah.**

“And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands. And he stretched himself upon him, and the flesh of the child grew warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house once to and fro, and went up, and stretched himself upon him. And the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (Second Kings 4:32-35).

And the power of Paul to heal was even greater. For remember what the text says about him, **“And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so as to even bring handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin to those who were incapacitated and to free their infirmities from them, and the evil spirits to go out from them” (Acts 19:11-12).** Moreover, the next passage says **“they brought the boy alive, and were not a little comforted.”**

Conversed for a considerable time

- **And after getting up, and having broken bread and eaten, and having conversed for a considerable time, until dawn, thus he departed. And they brought the boy alive, and were not a little comforted (Acts 20:11-12).**

Remember, they had assembled on the first day of the week. And the boy fell after Paul **“prolonged the word until midnight.”** Hence, their breaking of bread after that event indicates they were eating an early morning meal. It would have been a convenient time to dine, since the fall had interrupted Paul’s conversation with them. Then after the meal they conversed again for a considerable time, even until dawn.

Remember, there were no New Testament scriptures at that time. And Paul had a lot of things to teach them, and not much time for it. Notice how willing those disciples were to endure an all night conversation with him to learn more about the good news of Christ and how we should live it. Thankfully, the need to endure such lengthy meetings in order to learn about the word of God are now very rare.

Sailing on the way to Jerusalem

- **But we, having gone ahead to the ship, went up to Assos, intending from there to take up Paul, for so it was arranged, he himself intending to go on foot. And when he met with us at Assos, having taken him up, we came to Mitylene. And having sailed from there on the next day, we arrived opposite Chios, and the next day we came near to Samos. And having remained in Trogyllium, on the following day we came to Miletus.**
- **For Paul determined to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not happen to lose time in Asia. For he was hastening, if it were possible, for him to become at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:13-16).**

Assos was a seaport about twenty miles south of Troas. Why Paul chose to travel there on foot instead of sailing with the other men is not told. Perhaps he thought he would have a better opportunity to evangelize on the way if he remained on land.

Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogyllium, and Miletus were all located on or near the west coast of Asia Minor. The distance from Troas to Miletus was about a hundred and eighty miles. Trogyllium and Miletus were both located about forty miles south of Ephesus. Paul chose to bypass Ephesus because he did not want to delay arriving at Jerusalem.

Why Paul wanted to become at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost was probably because of his mission for going there. He had decided to make a strong effort to evangelize the Jews in Jerusalem. I speak more about that farther on.

Summoning the elders at Ephesus

- **And from Miletus having sent to Ephesus, he summoned the elders of the congregation. And when they came to him, he said to them, Ye know, from**

the first day in which I stepped in Asia, how I became with you all the time, serving the Lord with all humility, and many tears and trials that befell me by the conspiracies of the Jews.

- **How I kept back nothing of these things that are beneficial, not to inform you, and to teach you in public, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:17-21).**

Although Paul bypassed Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem he did not neglect the disciples there. For he summoned the elders of the congregation to speak to them. He first explained how he had been toward them from the beginning.

He told how he had served the Lord with all humility. Paul never tried to lord over any of the congregations of Christ. He even paid his own expenses when he worked with them (see Acts 20:34).

We can learn more about his humility from what he wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians. False apostles had been challenging his work there at Corinth. And among the things he said about that problem, was, **“For even if I also should boast somewhat more abundantly about our authority (which the Lord gave us for building up and not for tearing you down), I will not be shamed, so that I would not seem as if to terrify you by the letters. Because, The letters, he says, are indeed weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is disdained.**

“Let such a man think this, that such kind we are in word by letters when absent, we are also such kind when present in the work. For we dare not classify or compare ourselves to some of those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves to themselves, do not understand. But we will not boast in things immeasurable, but according to the measure of the standard that God apportioned to us, of a measure to reach even as far as you” (Second Corinthians 10:8-13).

And farther down in that letter he told how the disciples there forced him to boast. He was forced because they were listening to those false apostles. Among the many things he said, was, **“For if I should want to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will speak the truth. But I refrain lest any man should reckon to me above what he sees of me or hears anything from me. ...**

“I have become foolish, boasting. Ye compelled me, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I came short in nothing of those, superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty works. For what is there which ye were inferior to the other congregations? Except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong.

“Behold, a third time I fare readily to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you, for I seek not the things of you, but you. For the children ought not lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I most gladly will spend, and will be spent for your souls. Even though more earnestly loving you, the worse I am loved” (Second Corinthians 12:6-15).

Paul also told the elders of the congregation at Ephesus that he had suffered many tears and trials because of the conspiracies of the Jews. Notice that Paul did not say anything about suffering tears and trials because of the Romans. Modern theologians continually lie and deny that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus and were the ones who continually persecuted Paul. Those theologians do it because they have many Jewish friends, and they have more love for them than for the truth.

Paul told those elders that he had kept back nothing of the things that were beneficial to them and to inform them. He said that he taught them in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Gentiles repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus. Paul loved the Lord and his truth, and he worked tirelessly to promote it. And the foundation of our salvation is repentance and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. That faith is a living faith that produces much good fruit of righteousness.

Paul told of what he will suffer

- **And now behold, I, bound in the spirit, am going to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me in it, except that the Holy Spirit testifies from city to city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I make nothing of the matter, nor do I hold my life precious to myself, so as to fully complete my course with joy, and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to solemnly testify the good news of the grace of God (Acts 20:22-24).**

When Paul said he was bound in the spirit, he did not mean he was being held by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. Paul was bound in his own spirit. For notice how the text says that the Holy Spirit continually warned him about the suffering he would face in Jerusalem.

Although denied by most everyone, God was not compelling Paul to go to Jerusalem, but allowing him to make an effort to evangelize the Jews there. It was Paul's own decision, not the decision of the Holy Spirit. Paul was so full of love for his countrymen that he was willing to face severe persecution for the opportunity to preach to them. The Lord knew how eager Paul was for that mission. Therefore, he allowed him, but not without many warnings of what he would face.

We are under the law of liberty, and God allows us many freedoms to choose how we will live our lives, as long as what we choose conforms to his truth and righteousness. And God allowed Paul that freedom as well. Paul made that choice unselfishly because of his great love for his countrymen.

Here is what Paul said about that love in his letter to the Romans: **"I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience testifying to me in the Holy Spirit, that great distress is in me, and unceasing sorrow in my heart. For I wished I myself to be accursed from the Christ, for my brothers, my kinsmen according to flesh, who are Israelites, of whom is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the lawgiving, and the divine service, and the promises, of whom are the fathers, and from whom (according to flesh) is the Christ, God who is over all is blessed into the ages. Truly"** (Romans 9:1-5).

Therefore he was willing to “make nothing” of the afflictions he would suffer in Jerusalem. Paul had fulfilled his commission to evangelize the Gentiles. Now he wanted to complete his course and his ministry (which he received from the Lord Jesus) with joy by solemnly testifying the good news of the grace of God to his countrymen in Jerusalem. That is why he was bound in the spirit, his own spirit of love for his countrymen,

Paul had done his duty toward them

- **And now behold, I have seen that ye will no longer see my face, ye all among whom I passed through preaching the kingdom of God. Therefore I solemnly declare to you this day, that I am clean from the blood of all men. For I did not withdraw from declaring to you the whole plan of God (Acts 20:25-27).**

God must have told Paul that he would never be able to return to them. Therefore, he could say they would no longer see his face. Knowing it was the last time he would speak to them, Paul assured them he had declared the whole plan of God to them. Consequently, although they did not have the written words of the New Testament, they had been taught every part of what God planned for the good news of Christ.

That means there was nothing they lacked in knowing how to be a faithful disciple of Christ. And that meant further that Paul had completely fulfilled his obligation to teach them. Hence, he assured them they had been taught everything by saying that he was clean from the blood of all men. Although Paul had certainly not taught every man personally, he had proclaimed the whole plan of God so that it could spread and become available to all men.

As guardians, tend the flock

- **Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit placed you guardians, to tend the church of the Lord and God, which he purchased by his own blood.**
- **For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And from you yourselves men will rise up, speaking distorted things, to draw away the disciples after them.**
- **Therefore watch ye, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease warning each one with tears (Acts 20:28-31).**

The leaders of each congregation were chosen from the senior men who had the right qualifications of character and spirit. Various passages of the New Testament refer to them with descriptive terms such as elders, presbyters (a transliterated Greek word that means elder), overseers, and guardians. They were never given special labels such as Bishop (which some versions erroneously use). Such labels elevate men and set them apart like the rulers of the world. And Jesus condemned that kind of leadership in the kingdom of God (see for example, Matthew 20:25-28).

When Paul said the Holy Spirit had placed them guardians, to tend the church of the Lord and God, that does not mean they were personally chosen by the Holy Spirit. It simply means that the Holy Spirit made part of the good news of Christ to include having each congregation choose men to oversee them, to tend them, to manage the various affairs of them. It was because of that requirement those men were chosen. I speak much more about the role of the elders of the congregations in my comments about Paul's qualifications for them (see First Timothy 3 and Titus 1).

The grievous wolves that Paul warned about were the men who perverted the leadership of the disciples to create offices like Bishop. They even separated the flock into two classes, the clergy and the laity, which further elevated those men above the general membership. Such distinctions were part of the distorted things Paul warned the elders of the congregation at Ephesus about.

Paul told how those grievous wolves would rise up, speak distorted things (such as the matter of leadership), and draw away the disciples after them. It has always been a failing among men to hand their personal responsibilities to aggressive men with charm and cunning, and follow them. It is easier. And it is done more or less virtually everywhere. The Roman Catholic laity are even warned by their leaders not to read the Holy Bible for themselves. Is that not easier than having to study those words and make judgments about them? Yet it keeps them in bondage to those grievous wolves of the Catholic hierarchy.

Paul knew by inspiration that such things would happen. Consequently, he warned them **"for three years, night and day."** And he warned each one with tears. Paul warned with tears because of his great love for the authentic good news of Christ. And it was very grievous for him to know that such distortions would happen.

Paul's commits them to God

- **And now brothers, I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build up, and to give you an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified** (Acts 20:32).

Paul said the word of God's grace is able (1) to build up, and (2) to give an inheritance among those who have been sanctified. The word of God's grace includes all those parts of the holy scriptures that tell us how we should live and why. And those things will build us up if we live by them. Every nation that has sought to live by the word of God's grace has been elevated in its character and made stronger in every way.

The word of God's grace is also able to give us an inheritance, the inheritance of being sons of God for eternity. And that inheritance is only through our sanctification through Christ. And that sanctification comes through our faith and obedience to him. Remember what Peter said to the Jews about Jesus: **"And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

More blessed to give than to receive

- **I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands served my needs, and to those who were with me. I gave you a glimpse of all things, that so laboring ye ought to aid the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:33-35).**

Paul worked to support himself and the other men with him. He did not burden the congregation in any way. Remember what the text said about Paul and Aquila in Corinth: **“And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and was working, for they were of the tentmakers craft. And he was discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath, and was persuading Jews and Greeks”** (Acts 18:3-4).

Paul's self-support was not only to keep him from burdening them, but it was to provide an example for them. It was a part of the **“glimpse of all things”** involved in living the life of a disciple of Christ. Part of which is to labor for ourselves and to aid the weak. And he meant the truly weak, not just every poor man. For there are many poor who are unworthy of any kind of aid, able men who are lazy and irresponsible.

Receiving is certainly a blessing. However, giving is more blessed because it is an act of righteousness. Anybody can receive, but generosity is a quality of character. Especially when giving is sacrificial. It is interesting to note that the words Paul quoted from Jesus about giving and receiving are not found in any other part of the Bible. And we are not told where Paul first heard them.

He prayed with them all

- **And having spoken these things, having knelt down, he prayed with them all (Acts 20:36).**

Although Paul knelt when he prayed with them, that example should not be taken as a command for us to follow. Examples alone should never be used to infer commands. Kneeling in prayer and worship is a very old tradition. For example, the ninety-fifth psalm says, **“O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before Jehovah our maker”** (Psalm 95:6). And remember this passage about Jesus in the garden with his apostles the night of his betrayal: **“And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw. And he knelt down and prayed ...”** (Luke 22:41). Kneeling in prayer is a good tradition, but it is not a command.

Their sorrow at his departure

- **And there developed considerable weeping of all. And having fallen on Paul's neck, they kissed him much, sorrowing especially for the word that he had spoken, that they were going to see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship (Acts 20:37-38).**

I have no doubt the kind of weeping done by those men during that time was the less emotional quiet shedding of tears, rather than the audible kind like sobbing. Nevertheless, they did show their emotion of love for him by falling upon his neck and kissing him much. Those elders of the congregation at Ephesus had good reason to be very sorrowful, because they would not see his face again.

Kissing, as well as embracing, is of course an ancient way of displaying affection. Moreover, kissing is often used as a form of greeting. Consider for example this passage from the book of Genesis: **“And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother, and that he was Rebekah’s son. And she ran and told her father”** (Genesis 29:10-12).

Paul ended several of his letters with words like these: **“Salute each other by a holy kiss”** (Second Corinthians 13:12). However, like kneeling in prayer, kissing is a tradition and not a command. It is no more a command than for us to literally wash each other’s feet. For remember what Jesus commanded his apostles during the last supper: **“If I then, the Lord and the teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash each other’s feet. For I have given you an example, so that just as I have done to you ye also should do”** (John 13:14-15).

I do want to point out that when we do greet each other literally with a kiss it should be holy. That means it should always be clean and wholesome. It should never be done in any way that could be viewed otherwise. Nevertheless, since greeting with a kiss is considered by most Americans as appropriate only for the most close relationships, it would be best for us not to practice that tradition in our congregations. In fact, for most members they would at least be embarrassed by it. What modern Americans are now doing publicly in excess is embracing.

Sailing from place to place

- **And when it came to pass to launch us, after being drawn away from them, after going a straight course, we came to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gotten on, we launched. And having sighted Cyprus, and having left it behind on the left side, we sailed to Syria and came down to Tyre, for there the ship was unloading the cargo** (Acts 21:1-3).

Cos and Patara were all on the south side of Asia Minor. Rhodes is a large island between them. Phoenicia was a small territory on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is now called Lebanon. It borders the larger land of Syria. Remember, Cyprus is a large island half way between Asia Minor and Syria. Tyre was a seaport in Phoenicia, and was about a hundred miles north of Jerusalem.

Paul warned not to go to Jerusalem

- **And having found disciples we remained there seven days, who said to Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem** (Acts 21:4).

The reason Paul and his companions remained at Tyre for seven days is not told. There could have been several reasons. They may have wanted to take some rest after the long sea journey before traveling to Jerusalem. They also may have wanted to spend time teaching and encouraging the disciples there. They may even have wanted to do some evangelizing in Tyre while they had the opportunity.

The most noteworthy part of that passage is when it says the disciples told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit was warning Paul through those disciples. He was not commanding him against going, for it is inconceivable that Paul would have gone against such a command of God. That passage is powerful evidence that God allowed Paul to decide for himself about going, even though God advised him against it.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to wonder how such a thing could be? God allowed Paul to go against his will, but he did not condemn him because of it. That fact reveals at least two things. First, our heavenly Father has given us much liberty to decide for ourselves how we want to live. As long as what we do is righteous, he allows us to decide.

We make many choices about many things as we live. But whatever choices we make always have consequences. And there are many things that involve what psychologists call approach-avoidance conflicts we must sometimes make. Consequences that give a blessing either way. In such cases we must decide which blessing we prefer. Perhaps an example of that is sometimes choosing which person to marry, even though either choice would be a good one. Stories of fiction are often about such conflicts.

There are also approach-avoidance conflicts, meaning there are both good and bad consequences about the choice. And we must decide if we want to accept the bad consequences in order to enjoy the good consequences. A classic example is marriage, which always has both blessings and sacrifices to it. That is the kind of conflict Paul faced about his decision to go to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit warned Paul that the consequences of going would be severe. But Paul was willing to accept that on the chance he could succeed with some of the Jews.

Second, unlike what is commonly believed, God does not know everything that will happen in the future. He does know everything that *can* happen, and what the consequences would be. But God does not know every event that actually will happen. The reason is because we have free will. And for many things, the only way God can know exactly what will happen in the future is to cause it.

There are many passages in the Bible that teach that lesson. Here is only one of them: **“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the agent of Jehovah called to him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Do not lay thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything to him. For now I know that thou fear God, since thou have not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me”** (Genesis 22:10-12). Notice how God said, **“For now I know that thou fear God”** God did not know for certain how completely Abraham feared God until he tested him that way.

God knows what many men will do in the future about many things, not because he causes them, but because he has already tested the kind of spirit they have. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, not because he caused him to do it, but because he knew the kind of spirit Judas had. Judas had already proved himself to have a corrupted spirit. You can read much more about God's providence in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the scriptural evidence, many believers insist that God knows everything that will happen in the future. Like the command to be immersed for the remission of sins, they dismiss all the evidence and twist the meaning of the scriptures to conform to their misguided conviction.

Be not stiff-necked like them, and humbly accept what the Bible teaches. You will come to appreciate the supreme greatness, the perfect goodness, and the infinite love that God has for us even more when you do. And that appreciation will be enlightened appreciation, not one of blind faith. You can read much more about God and his ways in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

God allowed Paul to go to Jerusalem on that mission because of Paul's intense love for his countrymen. What God knew was that the Jews would reject Paul's efforts to evangelize them, and he knew how severely they would persecute him. Paul's hope was that he could at least convert some of them. And that was why he wanted to try, even though it meant being severely persecuted.

They accompanied him to the ship

- **And when it came to pass for us to finish the days, having gone forth, we were departing, all accompanying us, with women and children, as far as outside the city. And having knelt on the beach we prayed. And having bid farewell to each other, we went up in the ship, and those men returned to their own things** (Acts 21:5-6).

The wording of that passage suggests that most if not all of the congregation accompanied Paul and his companions as they went toward the ship. They went as far as the beach outside the city. Which could not have been very far because the children were brought with them. The text does not describe anything about how they prayed, except to say they knelt. There are many acceptable ways to pray. Neither does it tell what they prayed. However, it think it obvious that they included asking God to protect Paul and his companions on their journey.

Although they could have traveled from Tyre to Jerusalem on land, they chose to travel by sea. However, no reason was given for that choice. There are many possible reasons, about which I will not conjecture because it is so unimportant to know.

Lodging with a brother at Caesarea

- **And when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais. And having greeted the brothers, we remained with them one day. And on the morrow, after going forth, those around Paul came to Caesarea. And**

having entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, being of the seven, we dwelt with him (Acts 21:7-8).

Ptolemais was about thirty miles south of Tyre. Caesarea was about fifty miles south of Ptolemais. There was also a congregation at Ptolemais. For the kingdom of God had been spreading to many cities of the Gentiles.

Caesarea was the main seaport for Jerusalem, which itself was about thirty-five miles inland from the coast. When the passage says that Philip the evangelist was of the seven, that means he was one of the seven men chosen to supervise the daily assistance for the widows in Jerusalem. Remember, the Gentile Christians had murmured against the Hebrew Christians because their widows were being neglected (see Acts 6:1). In response the apostles advised appointing seven men to oversee that work. And Philip the evangelist was one of the men chosen.

Paul will be bound in Jerusalem

- **Now four virgin daughters who prophesied were with this man. And as we remained more days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And having come to us, and having taken Paul's belt, having bound both his feet and hands, he said, The Holy Spirit says these things: Thus the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man whose belt this is, and will deliver him into the hands of Gentiles** (Acts 21:9-11).

The Bible record tells about some women who prophesied as well as men. However, those women always remained subservient. Notice how the Holy Spirit sent the man Agabus from Judea to prophesy about Paul, even though those four virgin daughters who prophesied were already there. The Holy Spirit did not use those women for that message.

That prophecy was yet another warning to Paul about how he would be treated by the Jews in Jerusalem. This time it was a very graphic one, showing him exactly how he would be bound by the Jews. He was also warned that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. Actually, the record later tells how he was treated better by the Gentiles than he was by the Jews. Perhaps knowing that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles (the Roman officials) gave Paul some encouragement (among those warnings) that his persecutions there would be limited.

The Jews wanted to utterly destroy Paul, but the Roman officials protected him. He was indeed bound, but he was kept in the protected custody of the Romans.

Paul would not be dissuaded

- **And when we heard these things, both we and those local men urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. And Paul answered, What are ye doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I fare ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he was not persuaded, we were quiet, having said, May the will of the Lord happen** (Acts 21:12-14).

Having heard that warning, the men at Caesarea, as well as Paul's companions, all urged Paul not to go. Yet Paul refused to change his mind. He was so intent upon trying to bring his countrymen to Christ that he had prepared himself for the worse that could happen to him. Paul's successes with converting many Gentiles must have persuaded him that he could also convert some of his fellow Jews. The Holy Spirit told Paul not to go, and he showed him how he would be put in custody. However, Paul still had the hope that some of the Jews could be converted to Christ. And that hope is what kept him committed to go.

Their pleading with Paul troubled his heart. For he had great love for them, and did not want to be the cause of their sorrow. Hence, his heart was breaking, being torn between his commitment to go, and their pleas that he not go. Nevertheless, they finally accepted his decision and stopped their pleading, saying, **"May the will of the Lord happen."**

That means they were trusting in whatever God would allow. For God's will can be either what he wants to happen or what he will allow to happen. And God did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem. For remember what happened in Tyre: **"And having found disciples we remained there seven days, who said to Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem"** (Acts 21:4). Yet God still allowed him.

Paul meets with the brothers at Jerusalem

- **And after these days, having made preparation, we went up to Jerusalem. And also the disciples from Caesarea went together with us, bringing a certain Mnason, a Cypriot, an old disciple with whom we would lodge. And when we came to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.**
- **And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And having greeted them, he reported one by one what God did among the Gentiles through his ministry** (Acts 21:15-19).

How many disciples from Caesarea went with Paul and his companions is not told. Only Mnason is named, and that is the only place in the Bible where he is named. Mnason was probably mentioned by name because he was going to lodge them. He may have been a Gentile, because the text says he was a Cypriot. However, the record earlier said that Barnabas was **"a Levite, a Cypriot by nationality ..."** (Acts 4:36).

Paul met with the elders the day following their journey. Remember, it was almost fifty miles from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Why the text says they went in to James is not told. Many claim James was the main leader (they call him the bishop) of the church at Jerusalem. I cannot believe that because the Bible says nothing about any man being given authority as a leader of any group of Christians.

Peter was given the keys of the kingdom to open its gates, which he used once for the Jews and once for the Gentiles. Peter also served often as a leader, but without special authority or rank. The concept of a bishop is foreign to the teachings of Christ.

I suspect James owned property that was the most convenient place for them to gather in meetings. That would explain why they went in to him where all the elders were present.

Paul did not go to Jerusalem often. Hence, he greeted them when he arrived. That would have given them time to have a brief conversation with him before he gave his report. And

the Christians in Jerusalem were no doubt very interested in the work that Paul had been doing with the Gentiles.

Notice how the text gives God credit for the work that Paul did through his ministry. Paul always gave God the credit for his achievements. For example, when the Corinthians were beginning to make comparisons between workers, Paul said, **“Who therefore is Paul and who is Apollos? But rather helpers through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to each man. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused growth. So then neither is he who plants anything, nor he who waters, but God who causes growth”** (First Corinthians 3:5-7).

Rumors about Paul and the law

- **And when the men heard, they glorified God, having said to him, Thou see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed, and they are all zealots of the law. And they were informed about thee, that thou teach all the Jews throughout the nations desertion from Moses, telling them not to circumcise the children nor to walk by the customs** (Acts 21:20).

This is a very important passage showing how the law of Moses was not completely abolished with the establishment of the church. The Jewish Christians were still **“all zealots of the law.”** And they were not criticized for it. The problem the early church had with the law of Moses was whether or not the Gentiles were bound by it, not that it should be completely abolished for the Jews.

For one thing, the law of Moses was part of the civil laws of their nation. And since Jesus had been rejected by the rulers of the nation as well as the majority of its citizens, the law of Moses was kept in force. Hence, the citizens of Israel were bound to the law whether they wanted it or not. Nevertheless, those thousands of Jewish Christians did not want to forsake the law. They remained zealots of it. It is very difficult for people to give up life-long traditions they have always been taught were the best.

Nevertheless, God being patient with them, he gradually phased out the law of Moses. For the book of Hebrews says this about the old and the new covenants: **“But now he has obtained a superior ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a superior covenant, which has been enacted upon superior promises. For if that first one was faultless, no place would have been sought for a second.**

“For, finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, and I will perfect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by my hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

“Because this is the covenant that I will ordain with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, giving my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be to them for a God, and they will be to me for a people. And they will, no, not teach each man his fellow citizen, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because all will know me, from their small as far as their great.

Because I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins and their lawlessness I will no, not further remember.

“In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance” (Hebrews 8:6-13).

Thus, the first covenant involving the law of Moses, God made old. When the book of Hebrews was first written, the law was **“becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance.”** And then God completely abolished the law of Moses with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. For it is now impossible for any man to obey that law completely. In fact, it is impossible for the Jews of obey most of those laws. Examine the law for yourself and you will see.

After that destruction the unbelieving Jews then created a hybrid religion called Judaism. It is composed of a few of the laws of Moses (often much altered) plus a host of their own traditions which they call the oral law. Nevertheless, God has never sanctioned it. And one of the ironic things about Judaism is that it is so full of statutes and ordinances that none of the Jews obey it completely either. For many of those traditions are meaningless yokes around their necks.

Let no disciple of the devil convince you that Judaism is what God gave the sons of Israel by the mouth of Moses. Judaism is a false religion created to fill the void left by God's abolition of the law of Moses. God never gave his people the religion of Judaism. The propaganda of the world would have you believe otherwise. Be not led astray by those enemies of truth.

The need to get together

- **What is it therefore? Certainly the multitude needs to get together, for they will hear that thou have come** (Acts 21:22).

The problem just stated by the elders was the rumor that Paul was teaching Jews to violate the law of Moses. However, there must have been some division about that accusation, because of the comment saying **“the multitude needs to get together.”** That comment probably means the disciples in Jerusalem needed to be united in knowing the truth about him. Because, since Paul was there, that would have stirred that controversy among them. The implication in those words was that something needed to be done to bring all the disciples together in what was the truth about Paul.

Advice for how to prove himself

- **Therefore do this that we say to thee. Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves. Having taken these, be purified with them. And pay expenses for them, so that they may shave the head. And all may know, that things of which they have been informed about thee, are nothing, but thou thyself also walk orderly, keeping the law** (Acts 21:23-24).

What the elders recommended was to perform that ritual as visible evidence that Paul still honored the law of Moses. That ritual was required to be done at the temple, which was no

doubt the most public place in the city. That meant that Paul's actions would have been seen by many men. And that would have best informed the people that Paul walked orderly and kept the law.

About the Gentiles and the law

- **And about the Gentiles who have believed, we sent word, having decided for them to keep no such thing, except for them to guard against what is sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication (Acts 21:20-25).**

Remember, that decision about the Gentiles was given at the conference they held several years earlier, although that controversy about the Gentiles and the law of Moses lingered on for some time afterward. Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to oppose the efforts of some men to impose that law upon the Christians there.

For example, after his greeting to the Galatians, Paul said to them, **"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him who called you in the grace of Christ to another good news, which is not another, except there are some who confuse you, and who want to pervert the good news of the Christ. But even if we, or an agent from heaven, should preach a good news to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, I now also say again, if any man preaches a good news to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed"** (Galatians 1:6-9).

Those are very strong words of condemnation against those who pervert the good news of Christ, which is what those men were doing in Galatia. They were trying to create a different hybrid religion by combining parts of the good news of Christ with the law of Moses. And Paul uttered a curse against them for it. The fact he uttered that curse against them twice, which shows how vigorously he opposed it.

Nevertheless, the apostles were unable to prevent the development of that perversion, because the Roman Catholic church is one result of it. For example, that church created a hierarchical priesthood to rule over their members, something that is completely foreign to what Jesus and his apostles taught. They justify themselves by claiming what they call apostolic succession. Which means those in ecclesiastical power have the same authority of the original apostles to proclaim the word of God. They claim what they say is God's law, regardless of what the Bible teaches.

And they discourage all of their members from even reading the Bible. My wife told me about a Roman Catholic woman who found herself in a hospital room that contained a Gideon Bible. Those Bibles were donated by a group calling themselves Gideons. The woman, having a lot of spare time, and being bored there, she began reading that Bible. After reading the Bible, she said she did not know what kind of Christian she was, but she knew she was no longer a Catholic. She was obviously a woman who loved truth.

Paul in the temple

- **Then Paul, having taken the men on the following day, having been purified with them, entered into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of**

purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them (Acts 21:26).

The vow those four men had upon themselves was no doubt the Nazirite vow because of the requirements of it, part of which was for them to shave their heads at the end of it. Here are the requirements for that vow: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, When either man or woman shall make a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to Jehovah, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any juice of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the kernels even to the husk.**

“All the days of his vow of separation there shall no razor come upon his head. Until the days be fulfilled, in which he separates himself to Jehovah, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long. He shall not come near to a dead body all the days that he separates himself to Jehovah. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy to Jehovah ... [Instructions are given here about what to do if the man becomes inadvertently unclean.]

“And this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled: He shall be brought to the door of the tent of meeting, and he shall offer his oblation to Jehovah: one he-lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe-lamb a year old without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their meal offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall present them before Jehovah, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering. And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to Jehovah, with the basket of unleavened bread. The priest shall also offer the meal offering of it, and the drink offering of it.

“And the Nazirite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazirite, after he has shaven his separation, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before Jehovah. This is holy for the priest, together with the wave-breast and heave-thigh. And after that the Nazirite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazirite who vows, and of his oblation to Jehovah for his separation, besides that which he is able to get. According to his vow which he vows, so he must do after the law of his separation” (Numbers 6:1-21).

Notice how the law required the men to shave their heads on the seventh day.

Jews against Paul fomented a riot

- **And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and threw hands on him, crying out, Men, Israelites, help. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place.**
- **And besides he also brought Greeks into the temple, and has defiled this holy place. For they were men who saw Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they supposed that Paul brought into the temple.**
- **And the whole city was moved, and there developed a running together of the people. And having taken Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and straightaway the doors were shut (Acts 21:27-30).**

Those Jews from Asia were just as lawless in their behavior toward Paul there in the temple as they had been in those Gentile nations. For instead of alerting those in charge of the temple services, those Jews just **“stirred up all the people and threw hands on him, crying out”** Rather than be orderly those enemies of Paul fomented a riot.

The activities of the temple were carefully managed by the Levites, which was the tribe that God chose for that role. The chief priests were of the family of Aaron, which was also of the tribe of Levy. The Bible describes how David the king and Samuel the prophet organized the Levites to better manage the activities of the temple.

Here is part of one passage that gives those details: **“All these who were chosen to be porters in the thresholds were two hundred and twelve. These were reckoned by genealogy in their villages, whom David and Samuel the seer ordained in their office of trust. So they and their sons had the oversight of the gates of the house of Jehovah, even the house of the tent, by wards. On the four sides were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south.**

“And their brothers, in their villages, were to come in every seven days from time to time to be with them; for the four chief porters, who were Levites, were in an office of trust, and were over the chambers and over the treasuries in the house of God. And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge *of it* was upon them, and to them pertained the opening of it morning by morning.

“And certain of them had charge of the vessels of service, for by count were these brought in, and by count were these taken out.

“Some of them were also appointed over the furniture, and over all the vessels of the sanctuary, and over the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests prepared the confection of the spices. And Mattithiah, one of the Levites, who was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the office of trust over the things that were baked in pans. And some of their brothers, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the showbread to prepare it every sabbath.

“And these are the singers, heads of fathers of the Levites, *who dwelt in the chambers and were free from other service*, for they were employed in their work day and night” (First Chronicles 9:22-33).

All those Jews from Asia needed to do was to take their accusations and alert the porters who had the oversight of the gates of the temple. Those porters would then have taken Paul to be tried properly before the priests. But those Jews were lawless men, choosing rather to create hysteria by the crowd to attack Paul whom they hated. And the low character of the Jews during that time in their history was such that they were easily stirred up that way.

Notice how the passage says **“the whole city was moved, and there developed a running together of the people.”** That is not the kind of behavior expected of an orderly people. That is the same kind of thing done by those Gentiles in Ephesus when Paul and his companions were accused by the silversmith Demetrius and the other craftsmen. Remember how hysterically the people acted. It is also typical of the behavior of American Negroes and of Muslims, which history clearly verifies.

The Roman captain arrests Paul

- **And while seeking to kill him, a report went up to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem has been stirred up. And immediately after taking soldiers and centurions, he ran down to them. And they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul.**
- **And the chief captain having come near, he seized him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains. And he inquired whoever he may be, and what it is he has been doing. And some among the crowd shouted out one thing, some another. And not being able to know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be carried into the fort (Acts 21:31-34).**

The Romans have been criticized for occupying Israel. However, they were the ones who maintained civilized order in that spiritually decadent country. The people had no legal right to beat Paul. What evidence did they have against him? It was only when the Roman soldiers arrived that the people became more orderly.

Notice how the crowd did not even know what the charges were against Paul. Yet they still rioted and created an uproar. The chief captain seized Paul and bound him with chains partly to save him from the crowd and partly to keep him in custody for an investigation.

The chief captain commanded Paul be carried into the fort. Paul was to be carried because he had been bound hand and foot by the Jews. Remember this passage that prophesied it would happen: **“And as we remained more days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And having come to us, and having taken Paul’s belt, having bound both his feet and hands, he said, The Holy Spirit says these things: Thus the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man whose belt this is, and will deliver him into the hands of Gentiles”** (Acts 21:10-11).

Paul asks to speak to the people

- **And it came to pass when on the steps (it happened for him to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mass of the people followed, crying out, Away with him), and as Paul was going to be brought into the fort, he says to the chief captain, Is it permitted for me to speak to thee?**
- **And he said, Thou know Greek? Then thou are not the Egyptian who revolted before these days, and who led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins? But Paul said, I am really a Jewish man of Tarsus of Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city. And I beg thee, allow me to speak to the people (Acts 21:35-39).**

Notice how the passage speaks of the violence of the crowd. They were not violent against the Romans, but against Paul. And their hysteria was not rational. Nevertheless, Paul wanted to reason with them. For this would be an ideal opportunity for him to teach them about the good news of Christ. And he would be speaking with those who were the most zealous for the law of God.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he spoke of the zeal of the Jews for God: **“For I testify to them that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge”** (Romans 10:2). And since their zeal for God was not according to knowledge, this occasion would give Paul a wonderful opportunity to give them the knowledge they needed.

The chief captain was surprised that Paul could speak Greek, which was the international language of that time. He had classified Paul with one of the rebels who used force to resist the Roman occupation.

Remember what Gamaliel had said about such men when Peter and the apostles were being tried before the council of the Jews: **“And he said to them, Men, Israelites, take heed to yourselves what ye are going to do against these men. For before these days Theudas rose up saying himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, bonded themselves, who was killed. And all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and developed into nothing. After this man Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the registration, and drew a considerable crowd behind him. That man was also destroyed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were scattered.**

“And now I say to you, keep away from these men, and let them go, because if the project or this work is from men, it will be overthrown, but if it is from God, ye cannot overthrow it, and perhaps ye may be found to be fighting against God” (Acts 5:35-39).

The people begin listening to Paul

- **And having permitted him, Paul, having stood on the steps, motioned his hand to the people. And when a great hush developed, he called out in the Hebrew language, saying, Men, brothers, and fathers, hear now my defense**

to you. And having heard that he called out to them in the Hebrew language, they offered more silence (Acts 21:40-22:2).

The chief captain could see that Paul was an educated man and not a rebel. Hence, he allowed him to speak. No doubt the chief captain hoped that Paul could calm the mob, and save him the effort.

The text said previously that the soldiers who were carrying Paul were on the steps about to be brought into the fort. That means the mob followed Paul and the soldiers as far as to the fort. The text also said that **“the mass of the people followed ...”** Remember, it also said that **“all Jerusalem has been stirred up.”** That meant Paul had a marvelous opportunity to speak to many of the people of Jerusalem all at one time.

However, the first thing he needed was to calm them down. Since most of the people were confused about what was happening, they calmed down enough to listen to Paul. And when he spoke in the Hebrew language, they gave him even more silence. Hebrew was their native language, and not many Gentiles were able to speak it.

He tells how he persecuted the Way

- **And he says, I am indeed a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but reared in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, reared accurately in the paternal law, being a zealot of God, as ye all are today. And I persecuted this Way as far as death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest testifies about me, and all the senior council, from whom also having received letters to the brothers in Damascus, I was going to bring bound even those who were there to Jerusalem so that they might be punished** (Acts 22:2-5).

Paul first told them he was a Jewish man, although born in a Gentile city. He told them of his qualifications. Since Gamaliel was member of the Jewish council and a renown teacher, having been reared at his feet was a mark of distinction. And Paul had been reared accurately in the paternal law, the law of their nation. He also said he was as zealous of God as they were.

As evidence of that he described how he had persecuted the Way, the way of Jesus Christ. He even persecuted the Way as far as contributing to the deaths of believers. At a later time Paul described the ferocity of his persecutions: **“And I locked up many of the sanctified in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were killed, I gave a vote against them. And punishing them often at all the synagogues, I compelled them to blaspheme. And being extraordinarily furious toward them, I persecuted them even as far as to outside cities”** (Acts 26:10-11).

Paul also told that crowd how he had official sanction for his efforts. And those efforts went as far as going to Damascus to arrest Christians there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. By describing those things Paul let the people know how much he had opposed the Way of Christ. And everything he described about himself could be verified.

He tells of his vision of Jesus

- **And there happened to me, while going and approaching Damascus about noon, suddenly to flash forth from heaven a great light around me. And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? And I answered, Who are thou, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom thou persecute.**
- **And those who were with me indeed saw the light and became afraid, but they heard not the voice of him who spoke to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, After rising, go into Damascus, and there it will be told thee about all things that have been assigned for thee to do (Acts 22:6-10).**

Paul later described more about what Jesus said to him in that vision. However, what he said to the crowd was sufficient for them to know that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him in a vision from heaven. And the Lord told Paul it was he who was being persecuted by him. For everybody who persecutes us is persecuting Christ our Lord.

In the vision Jesus did not tell Paul what he needed to do. Instead, he sent him into Damascus where a disciple would tell him **“about all things that have been assigned for [him] to do.”** The purpose of that vision from the Lord was to convince Paul that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Therefore, Paul testified about that vision to those Jews who were attacking him. And the fact Paul had a vision could also be verified by the men who accompanied him to Damascus, although the nature of the vision was not revealed to Paul’s traveling companions.

His eyesight had been blinded

- **And as I was not seeing from the splendor of that light, I came into Damascus, being led by hand by those who accompanied me. And a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report by all the Jews who dwell there, having come near me, and having stood by, he said to me, Brother Saul, look up. And I looked up on him the same hour (Acts 22:11-13).**

Paul was careful to describe Ananias as a devout man according to the law and having a good reputation among all the Jews in Damascus. It was important for the crowd to give credibility to the man whom God had sent to Paul. It was also important to Paul to accept Ananias as truly being sent to him. And the restoration of his eyesight was clear proof that God had sent Ananias.

How God appointed Paul

- **And he said, The God of our fathers appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous Man, and to hear a voice from his mouth, because thou**

will be a witness for him to all men of the things that thou have seen and heard (Acts 22:14-15).

Paul told the crowd how Ananias informed him why he had that vision of Jesus. God had appointed Paul to be a witness for him. And Paul's testimony was to include the vision he had seen and heard from the resurrected Jesus. Later Paul described what Jesus said to him in more detail (see Acts 26:14-18). But what he told that crowd was sufficient for them to know that he had seen Jesus alive and had been appointed by God to witness for him.

Ananias called Jesus **"the Righteous Man."** Jesus lived as a man in this sinful world that is filled with temptations to sin. Yet he never sinned. He alone of all men lived a perfectly righteous life. Therefore, he deserved being called the Righteous Man, the one and only Righteous Man.

Becoming a disciple

- **And now what is it going to be? Having arisen, immerse and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord** (Acts 22:16).

Immersion for the remission of sins is always required to become a disciple of Christ. Commands and examples of that fact are found in many places in the New Testament scriptures. This is only one example. Notice also how Paul was required to submit willfully to that simple ritual. Nobody can become a disciple unless they agree to it. Let not the perverse teachings of the world lead you astray from obeying that commandment.

Being sent to Gentiles

- **And it came to pass, my having returned to Jerusalem and while I prayed in the temple, for me to became in a trance. And I saw him saying to me, Hurry and depart in haste out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept thy testimony about me.**
- **And I said, Lord, they know that I was imprisoning and beating in every synagogue those who believe in thee. And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I myself also was standing by, and approving his killing, and keeping the garments of those who killed him. And he said to me, Depart, because I will send thee far away to Gentiles** (Acts 22:17-21).

Paul no doubt knew how the Jews felt about Gentiles. However, he said about all he could, in the brief time he had, to prepare them for why he had been working with Gentiles. And so he explained how the Lord himself commanded him to go to them.

Paul told those Jews that the Lord said they would not accept his testimony about him. The Jews would not accept Paul's testimony even though they knew how severely he had persecuted the disciples. That was why the Lord was sending him to Gentiles.

Paul must have hoped that the Jews would have been more receptive to his testimony if they knew more of the facts about how the Lord appeared to Paul and commanded him to go to Gentiles. Remember what Paul said to the Roman brothers about how the Jews had a

zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. Paul probably hoped that with the knowledge he gave those Jews about his vision of the Lord they would then accept his testimony. The Jews had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. With the right knowledge they could then have a zeal for Christ. That must have been Paul's hope, and his motive for being there.

The Jews became enraged

- **And they heard him until this word. And they lifted up their voice, saying, Away with such a man from the earth, for he is not fit to live. And of them crying out, and throwing off their garments, and casting dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him be brought into the fort, having said to examine him by scourging, so that he might know for what reason they shouted against him this way (Acts 22:22-24).**

Notice how the crowd had quietly listened to Paul's testimony of a vision from Jesus, but not when he said he was sent to the Gentiles. Those Jews were so full of hatred for Gentiles that when Paul said he was sent to them they went completely berserk, demanding his destruction. Those Jews were even more savage and wild than the Ephesians were when they cried out about their goddess Artemis. I cannot think of any other public outcry that was more uncivilized than what was described in that passage; crying out, throwing off their garments, and casting dust into the air. They acted even worse than a child's tantrum.

Their response must have proven to Paul the utter hopelessness of converting them to Christ. God had warned him he would be rejected and persecuted. Perhaps Paul's greatest hope about them was that there were some among that throng who were receptive enough to want to learn more about Jesus Christ. For when Paul wrote the Corinthians, he said, **"And to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews, to those under law, as under law, so that I might gain those under law, to those without law, as without law (not being without law to God, but within law to Christ), so that I might gain men without law. To the weak I became as weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that by all means I might save some"** (First Corinthians 9:20-22).

The chief captain must not have understood Hebrew. Nevertheless, he no doubt had interpreters to keep him informed. Hence, he must have heard what Paul said, yet he was still confused about why those Jews shouted against Paul that way. He must not have understood the depth of hatred those Jews had for Gentiles. For that was what triggered their outcry.

The chief captain was going to examine Paul by scourging to find out why the Jews shouted against him that way. He was going to torture Paul to try to force him to reveal the reason for their outcry. That means he thought Paul was guilty of some great offence. He obviously could not believe the reason was simply because of their intense hatred of Gentiles. For the Jews had no doubt concealed that hatred from him. They concealed it because of the power he had over them, which power was often expressed ruthlessly. Consider how the Romans used the cruel punishment of crucifixion as one example.

Paul reveals he is a Roman

- **And as they stretched him out with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, Is it permitted for you to scourge a Roman man, and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard, having come to the chief captain, he reported, saying, Look! What are thou about to do? For this man is a Roman.**
- **And the chief captain having come, he said to him, Tell me if thou are a Roman. And he said, Yes. And the chief captain answered, Of a great sum I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said, But then I was born so.**
- **Straightaway therefore those who were about to examine him withdrew from him. And the chief captain was also afraid when he learned that he was a Roman, and because he was who bound him (Acts 22:25-29).**

Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid that scourging. The rights of Roman citizens were strictly enforced. Notice how the chief captain even became afraid when he learned Paul was a Roman. For he had violated Paul's rights by having him bound before he had been proven guilty of anything. That means the rights of a Roman citizen even surpassed the authority of a chief captain. And whoever violated those rights was obviously subject to harsh punishment.

Hence, being a Roman citizen was much coveted. Notice how the chief captain said he obtained his citizenship with a great sum. Nothing is ever said about the nationality of that captain, because he was obviously not a native Roman.

Paul and the council of the Jews

- **But on the morrow, wanting to know the certainty of why he was accused by the Jews, he loosed him from the bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to come. And having brought Paul down, he set him before them (Acts 22:30).**

Since the chief captain was still puzzled about the riot, he scheduled a hearing before the chief priests and the council of the Jews to learn what accusations they had against Paul. And he scheduled it as quickly as he was able. He was no doubt eager to have the controversy settled, because disturbances like riots were a threat to his own standing.

Paul and the high priest

- **And Paul, after looking intently at the council, said, Men, brothers, I have been a citizen in all good conscience to God until this day. And the high priest Ananias ordered those who stood by him to strike his mouth. Then Paul said to him, God is going to smite thee, a whitewashed wall. Thou even sit judging me according to the law, and violating law, thou command me to be struck? And those who stood by said, Thou revile God's high priest?**

And Paul said, I had not known, brothers, that he is a high priest, for it is written, Thou shall not speak ill of a ruler of thy people (Acts 23:1-5).

Paul was not saying that he had never sinned against God. He was saying that he had always been a righteous citizen of Israel. He had never violated his conscience (his knowledge of right and wrong) regarding the laws of the Jewish nation. In other words he had never committed a criminal act and God knew it. However, that is very different from living a sinless life, which no man has ever done or ever can do except for the only begotten Son of God. I explain more about that in my book *Becoming Son of God for Eternity*.

Paul also may have been speaking of his adult life, his life as a mature citizen, because we all sin in our youth. Consider what God said about the righteous man Job: **“For there is none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil”** (Job 1:8). Yet during the time of his great suffering, Job said to God, **“For thou write bitter things against me, and make me to inherit the iniquities of my youth”** (Job 13:26). God said that Job was a perfect and upright man. Yet Job confessed having committed iniquities of his youth.

Here is the passage of the law that Paul quoted: **“Thou shall not revile God, nor speak ill of a ruler of thy people”** (Exodus 22:28). What Paul said about the high priest violating the law was true. What Paul said that violated the law was accusing him of being a whitewashed wall. If Paul had left that part out of his words, he would not have violated that law. Because that high priest himself had violated the law, and God was going to punish him for it. That was a fact. Calling him a whitewashed wall was Paul’s opinion of him. And that was what Paul apologized about.

The Jews quarrel with each other

- **But when Paul ascertained that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men, brothers, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee. About the hope and resurrection of the dead I am judged.**
- **And when he said this, there developed a conflict of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the group was divided. For in fact Sadducees say to be no resurrection nor agent nor spirit, but Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there developed a great clamor. And some of the scholars of the Pharisees part having risen, they argued vehemently, saying, We find nothing wrong in this man. But if a spirit spoke to him, or an agent, we should not fight against God (Acts 23:6-9).**

The incident with the high priest proved to Paul that those rulers of the Jews were not interested in truth and justice. It was a sham court hearing. Consequently, Paul did not waste his time attempting to reason with them. Instead, he used his knowledge about their beliefs and about human psychology to set them against each other. And he did it without deception, because he truly was being judged about the hope and resurrection of the dead. How he was able to discern there were both Sadducees and Pharisees there is not told. Perhaps they dressed somewhat differently. Or perhaps they sat separately from each other, and Paul was able to deduce the two.

Notice how those leaders of the Jews behaved during that hearing. They acted as uncivilized as the mob did when they attacked Paul at the temple. Instead of reasoning together the way refined men do, they created a great clamor arguing vehemently.

That passage tells how the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection or in heavenly agents or in spirits. And that means they did not believe in the history of the Old Testament record. All they accepted about the Old Testament were the parts about the law of Moses. Otherwise they were complete skeptics.

In contrast the Pharisees believed everything about the Old Testament, including heavenly agents and spirits. Their biggest failing was adding many of their own traditions to what the holy scriptures commanded, plus their extreme legalism and their frequent hypocrisy about obedience.

What Paul said about why he was being tried gave those Pharisees an opportunity to lambast the Sadducees for their skepticism. Which, of course, aroused the Sadducees to defend themselves. Thus, those rulers turned from accusing Paul to accusing each other. It was a brilliant tactic by Paul, which was no doubt inspired by the Holy Spirit within him.

The chief captain rescues him

- **And a great conflict having developed, the chief captain, having been alarmed lest Paul might be torn apart by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from the midst of them, and bring him into the fort (Acts 23:10).**

That conflict was so great that the chief captain feared that Paul might be torn apart by those rulers of the Jews. You see how that reveals the extreme spiritual decadence of the Jews of that generation. Therefore, forty years after Jesus began his ministry, God finally poured out his wrath against them when he sent the Roman army to destroy the temple, Jerusalem, and their nation. And God had the few survivors scattered throughout the Gentile nations.

The Lord encourages Paul

- **And the following night the Lord, having stood by him, said, Cheer up, Paul, for as thou have testified these things about me at Jerusalem, so thou must testify also at Rome (Acts 23:11).**

That opportunity Paul had of testifying about Jesus to the Jewish people was the last one he had. For he remained in custody by the Romans for many years, probably until the end of his life, although the history in the book of Acts does not go beyond his bondage in Rome while waiting to appeal Caesar. Many have conjectured about what happened to Paul after that, but no man knows. Therefore, beware of boasts of knowing about such possible events.

The Lord allowed Paul to testify to the Jews in Israel. But after they rejected and condemned Paul, as he said they would, the Lord commanded him to testify at Rome. All the hearings that Paul endured during his bondage to the Romans allowed Paul to testify to the

highest authorities in both countries. For remember what Jesus prophesied to his apostles: **“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye will be brought to governors and even kings because of me, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles”** (Matthew 10:17-18).

A conspiracy to kill Paul

- **And when it became day, some of the Jews, having made a conspiracy, put themselves under a curse, saying neither to eat nor to drink until they would kill Paul. And there were more than forty who made this conspiracy, who, having come near to the chief priests and the elders, said, We have put ourselves under a curse, a curse to taste of nothing until we would kill Paul.**
- **Now therefore ye with the council report to the chief captain that tomorrow he may bring him down to you, as though going to inquire more accurately the things about him. And we, before he comes near, are prepared to kill him** (Acts 23:12-15).

That is just another example of how the Jews did not desire truth and justice. Those fanatical Jews planned to kill Paul with the approval of the chief priests and the elders. The chief priests and the elders had already condemned Paul to death even before he had a proper trial. They knew the Romans would not find Paul guilty, because he was not guilty. Hence, they would go the lawless route the Jews had always taken against Christ and his disciples.

I have always wondered how their curse afflicted those would-be assassins, because their plot was unsuccessful. I shudder to think how God justly applied that curse against them. For I have no doubt they did eat and drink after their failure. The record describes next why they failed.

Paul is told about the conspiracy

- **But the son of Paul’s sister, having heard of the ambush, having come and entered into the fort, he informed Paul. And Paul, having called one of the centurions, said, Take this young man to the chief captain, for he has something to inform him.**
- **Indeed therefore having taken him, he brought him to the chief captain, and says, Paul the prisoner, having called me, asked me to bring this young man to thee, who has something to say to thee** (Acts 23:16-18).

When Paul heard of the ambush he did not ask to speak to the chief captain himself. He asked to have the young man sent directly to the chief captain. It is always best to have testimony given by the witnesses and not by an intermediary. Also it would not have looked good for the chief captain to take action after speaking to Paul. The chief captain could have been accused of catering to Paul instead of respecting the accusations of the rulers against him. By speaking directly only with the young man the chief captain had good

cause to act without seeming to favor Paul. In fact, as the record next indicates, the chief captain acted without ever seeing Paul.

The chief captain is informed

- **And the chief captain having grasped his hand, and having gone in private, he asked him, What is it that thou have to inform me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask thee that tomorrow thou would bring Paul down to the council, as though going to inquire something more accurately about him.**
- **Therefore thou should not be persuaded by them, for more than forty men of them wait to ambush him, who have put themselves under an oath, neither to eat nor drink until they have killed him. And now they are ready, expecting the promise from thee.**
- **Indeed therefore the chief captain dismissed the young man, having ordered, Tell no man that thou have shown these things to me (Acts 23:19-22).**

Not only was Paul threatened by that ambush, but the lives of the soldiers who would have accompanied him to the chief priests and elders were also threatened. For the conspirators would have needed to fight with the soldiers to attack Paul. The soldiers who were taking Paul would probably have been outnumbered. Hence, there was a high probability that many if not most of them would have perished.

The chief captain wisely commanded the young man to say nothing about his meeting with the chief captain. For the more people who knew about it the greater would be the probability that it would have become known to the conspirators. And if that happened there was the risk another kind of attack would have been used.

Preparing to send Paul to the governor

- **And having summoned a certain two of the centurions, he said, Prepare two hundred soldiers that they may go to Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen at the third hour of the night. And provide beasts, so that after mounting Paul, they may bring him safely to Felix the governor, after writing a letter containing this form: (Acts 23:23-25).**

The chief captain immediately assembled a very strong force to take Paul away from Jerusalem. There were a total of four hundred and seventy soldiers, which was about ten times the number of conspirators threatening Paul. The third hour of the night was probably 9 PM. That meant they would be traveling during the night, and unknown by most of the people in Jerusalem, including the conspirators.

Notice also how the chief captain commanded that beasts be available to carry Paul. Although the record does not say, I suspect the chief captain learned how Paul was working with Gentiles, and that was the reason he had been attacked. Paul also made no attempt

to accuse the chief captain of binding him when he was seized. For as a Roman citizen Paul should not have been treated that way. Hence, by that time the chief captain probably had developed a high opinion of Paul.

The chief captain commanded Paul be taken to Caesarea, which was over fifty miles away. The first king Herod had Caesarea built for the very purpose of becoming a headquarters for the Roman occupiers. Hence, the city was named after the Caesars. That Herod was strongly allied with the Romans. Caesarea had an artificial harbor of remarkable construction for that age, but the city and its harbor are now in total ruins.

Sending a letter to Felix the governor explaining why Paul was sent to him was, of course, necessary. A formal letter from the chief captain would have been better than relying upon some subordinate to explain verbally. Verbal messages are often useful, but written ones are usually best. For that gives a permanent record, which means the contents of the message could not later be challenged.

A letter to governor Felix

- **Claudius Lysias to the eminent governor Felix, greeting. This man who was seized by the Jews, and was going to be killed by them, having stood by with the soldiers, I rescued him, having learned that he is a Roman.**
- **And wanting to know for what reason they accused him, I brought him down to their council, whom I found accusing about issues of their law, having not one accusation worthy of death or of bonds.**
- **And when it was reported to me of a plot going to be against the man by the Jews, I immediately sent him to thee, also having commanded the accusers to speak before thee the things against him. Be strong (Acts 23:26-30).**

The letter was factual except for the first part. That letter says the chief captain rescued Paul after learning he was a Roman. It says nothing about how he later learned Paul was a Roman after first having bound him. Had the chief captain been totally candid about the arrest it would have been not only embarrassing, but it would have put his position at risk. That would have especially been true in a written message.

Moreover, I doubt if Felix would have wanted to hear such a confession, especially in written form. Such self-serving alterations are common to the ways of the world, which is why wise men become increasingly skeptical of many things they hear.

The remaining part of the letter was completely factual, except for the chief captain's judgment of the charges against Paul. There was no basis for them, which is why the Jews wanted to kill Paul lawlessly. However, the plot being foiled, the accusers were now required to journey to Caesarea to appeal their case. And that journey was over fifty miles on land, which meant at least a day's travel time.

The chief captain concluded his letter with the words "Be strong." Remember, those were the same concluding words in the letter that the apostles, the elders, and the Christian brothers at Jerusalem sent to Antioch about the question of Gentiles and the law of Moses (see Acts 15:29). Apparently therefore, it was a common expression to close a formal let-

ter. However, Paul never used that expression to close the letters he wrote to the congregations and to some individuals that are recorded in the New Testament. His letters to them were much more personal.

Paul is delivered to the governor

- **Indeed therefore, the soldiers, according to that which was precisely arranged for them, having taken Paul, they brought him through the night to Antipatris. But on the morrow they returned to the fort, having allowed the horsemen to depart with him, who, after coming to Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor, also presented Paul to him.**
- **And the governor having read it, and having questioned from what province he was, and having found out that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will hear thee when thine accusers also will arrive. And he commanded him to be kept in the Praetorium of Herod (Acts 23:31-35).**

Antipatris was about twenty-five to thirty miles from Jerusalem. The soldiers arrived there after traveling through the night. Walking twenty-five to thirty miles takes at least eight to ten hours. That means they arrived at Antipatris the next morning. The four hundred footmen then returned to the fort at Jerusalem. Leaving the seventy horsemen to bring Paul to the governor at Caesarea. There they delivered Paul and the letter. Nothing more is said about those soldiers, but no doubt they too returned to the fort at Jerusalem.

Remember, the letter informed the governor that Paul was a Roman citizen. Remember also that Paul was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, which was a Roman province in Asia Minor. Why the governor was interested in where Paul was from is not told. Perhaps it was because Paul was also a Jew, and the governor was curious about his citizenship with Rome.

The governor commanded Paul be kept in the Praetorium of Herod. The Praetorium was a kind of headquarters or palace. It was probably originally build for the first Herod who created the city. And it apparently included places of confinement for Roman citizens who were being held.

The Jews bring an orator with them

- **And after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders, and a certain orator, Tertullus, who appeared to the governor against Paul. And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Experiencing much peace because of thee, and worthy deeds happening to this nation because of thy foresight, we welcome, both always and everywhere, eminent Felix, with all thankfulness (Acts 24:1-3).**

This time the Jews came prepared, bringing the orator Tertullus with them. He seemed to be like a modern lawyer used to plead a case before a court. Tertullus began by complimenting the governor Felix for his good oversight of their nation.

What Tertullus said was no doubt recognized as very hypocritical to Felix. For the Romans and the Jews both knew they hated each other. Yet such ingratiating toward their Roman rulers was still expected, because it showed they accepted their subservience to them. Such feigned words are common among sinners of the world, and the wise men among them know it.

Their accusations against Paul

- **But, that I may not detain thee on more, I entreat thee in thy clemency to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, who even instigates sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple, whom also we took, from whom thou will be able, having examined him, to learn about all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews also agreed, claiming to have these things this way (Acts 24:4-9).**¹

Here is the list of charges he brought against Paul:

He was a plague.

He instigated sedition among all the Jews throughout the world.

He was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

He attempted to profane the temple.

Tertullus closed his statement by claiming an examination of Paul would verify the accuracy of their accusations. And all the other Jews announced that they agreed. However, those Jews added no evidence to those accusations. Instead, they left it to the governor to investigate them. Nor did they explain how he was a plague, or how he instigated sedition, or how he attempted to profane the temple. All they did was make unverified accusations, and apply a derogatory label to him and the church. Such are the ways of the disciples of the devil. That is one reason why Solomon gave this proverb: **“He who pleads his case first seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out”** (Proverbs 18:17).

Paul denies any guilt

- **And when the governor gestured to him to speak, Paul answered, Knowing for many years thou being a judge to this nation, I gladly make a defense of these things about myself, thou being able to learn that there are for me not more than twelve days from which I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And they found me neither in the temple disputing against any man, nor making a gang of a group, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city. Neither can they prove against me of which things they now accuse me (Acts 24:10-13).**

Paul also complimented the governor at the beginning of his defense. However, what Paul said was genuine, because he expected a fair hearing before him. For apparently the gover-

1. Note: Acts 24:7 was omitted from the ACV Bible because it is not in the majority of the Greek manuscripts.

nor Felix had that reputation. That is no doubt why Paul said he was thankful. He would not have said such things before a governor like Herod.

Paul then simply explained the facts of the case objectively, facts that could easily be confirmed. Paul told Felix that the events at the temple occurred twelve days ago. And what he did there was lawful and peaceful. Paul also told how the Jews could not prove their accusations against him. They could certainly have brought false witnesses to support their accusations, but Paul also had witnesses that could dispute any false testimony such witnesses might bring.

Remember, There were four other men with Paul at the temple. And there were numerous other persons who could testify that Paul was not a plague, nor was he a ringleader that instigated sedition. In other words, Paul's supporters could have brought witnesses to deny anything that false witnesses might have said against him. And when there are conflicting witnesses about certain testimony none of it can be accepted as reliable evidence.

He confesses belonging to the Way

- **But this I confess to thee, that according to the Way that they call a sect, so serve I the paternal God, believing all things written according to the law and the prophets, having hope toward God, which they themselves also await, to come to be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And in this I fashion myself, having a conscience always non-stumbling before God and men (Acts 24:14-16).**

One thing Paul did not deny. And that was his faith in the Way of God that he proclaimed, which is the good news of Christ. And he would not call it a sect, because it is the true Way of God. Paul confessed to believe (1) in the paternal God, (2) in all things written according to the law and the prophets (meaning the Old Testament), and (3) in the hope toward God, which the Jews themselves await. Which hope is for a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. That was how and why Paul fashioned himself, and kept his conscience non-stumbling before God and men. In other words, Paul strove to live in such a way that in the resurrection he would be judged just before God.

By saying those things Paul revealed himself to be a righteous man living in obedience to what he had been taught about God and his will for us, including the law and the prophets. And his hope was for the coming resurrection, the new life after this one. He also revealed himself to be a refined, intelligent, and well educated man.

Paul explains why he is being judged

- **Now after more years I came, going to make donations to my nation, and offerings, during which certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, not with a crowd or with a tumult, who ought to be here before thee, and to accuse, if they would have anything against me.**
- **Or let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found in me, having stood before the council, or about this one voice that I cried out standing**

among them: About a resurrection of the dead I am judged by you this day (Acts 24:17-21).

Paul explained why he had been in the temple, and that he had behaved properly there. He also said that the Jews from Asia who found him in the temple should have been there to accuse him, if they had anything against him. The fact they were not there was itself evidence that Paul was guilty of no wrong doing. Paul then challenged those rulers of the Jews to be specific about what Paul was doing wrong in the temple.

He then repeated his statement about the real reason he was being judged. Namely about a resurrection of the dead. Paul no doubt knew that Felix would inquire of the chief captain about the first hearing. And that was the same thing Paul said during that first one. Although the wording was not exactly the same, the meaning was. And when the chief captain confirmed what Paul said, that would help him have more credibility with the governor. Especially, since the chief captain would no doubt also report the tumult created among those rulers.

The governor waits for the chief captain

- **Now Felix, having heard these things, having known more precisely the things about the Way, he deferred them, having said, When Lysias the chief captain comes down, I will determine the things toward you. He also arranged for the centurion to guard Paul, and to have reduced confinement, and to forbid none of his own men to serve or to come to him** (Acts 24:22-23).

That passage says that Felix had more precise knowledge of the Way, meaning the way of the good news of Jesus Christ. That meant he knew Paul was not a member of some lawless sect as those rulers had accused him. Nevertheless, it was his duty to await the testimony of the chief captain.

Paul obviously made a good impression with the governor. Felix could tell that Paul was a cultivated man and was harmless. Therefore, he arranged for him to have more freedom. He also allowed Paul's friends to visit him and to help him. That Roman governor was obviously not some ruthless tyrant. Otherwise he would not have treated Paul with that kindness.

The governor discourses with Paul

- **And after some days, Felix having arrived with Drusilla, his wife being Jewish, he summoned Paul, and heard him about the faith in Christ. And as he discoursed about righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment going to be, Felix, having become afraid, answered, Go now, and having a convenient time, I will summon thee** (Acts 24:24-25).

It was not uncommon for Jewish women to marry Gentiles. The command in the law not to marry certain peoples applied to Israelite men marrying certain Gentile women. For example, Esther married the king of Persia and was praised for it (see the book of Esther).

Moreover, Felix was no doubt not a member of one of those forbidden peoples. Felix' wife being Jewish meant he had a special source of knowledge about the Jews. And that may be one reason he knew more specifically about the Way.

Felix was obviously an educated man who was interested in Paul and his work with this new religion. Paul therefore spoke to him about righteousness, self-control, and the future judgment. The devil has confused the world about all of those things. The word of God reveals the truth about genuine righteousness. Hence, Paul reasoned with the governor about what righteousness really was.

He also reasoned with him about the necessity of proper self-control. For God has given mankind the power of free will. And since we are all subject to many temptations to sin, our self-control must be properly applied. And the greatest consequence to us about how we apply our self-control is the final judgment in the afterlife.

Learning those things caused Felix to be afraid. He was probably afraid because God was going to hold him accountable for all of his actions. Paul must have also given him more detail about the rewards and punishments that result from the final judgment. And if Felix had not lived according to God's righteousness, that meant he would have been judged guilty to suffer eternal punishment. That would certainly have caused any man to become afraid if he believed what Paul told him. And obviously Paul was very convincing to cause the governor to become afraid.

Nevertheless, Felix put off doing anything about the Way, claiming he would summon Paul at a convenient time. Remember, Jesus warned us that we would all need to sacrifice our worldly lives to become his disciple. And men like governors have a lot more to sacrifice. Consequently, like rich men it is much more difficult for them to commit themselves to Christ. And in the case of Felix there is no evidence he ever did find "a convenient time."

The governor hoped for a bribe

- **He also hoped simultaneously that money would be given him by Paul so that he might free him. And so, summoning him more frequently, he conversed with him (Acts 24:26).**

Hoping to get a bribe from Paul showed how Felix was not committed to righteousness. Bribery is by definition illegal. Nevertheless, it is very widely practiced in the world. Indeed, it is even considered a normal part of doing business in some countries, even though it remains illegal. It is just another example of how deceit permeates virtually everything in this world.

That is another reason why the disciples of Christ are not of this world. Remember for example, when in Jesus' prayer during the last supper, he said about his disciples, **"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name. Whom thou gave to me, I kept, and none of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now I come to thee. And I speak these things in the world, so that they may have my joy fulfilled in them. I have given them thy word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should**

keep them from the evil. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world” (John 17:12-16).

Jesus said twice they were not of the world just as he was not of the world. That means although we are in the world, we are not a part of how the world lives. The world lives by sin and deceit, but we live by truth and righteousness.

That passage in Acts indicates Felix’ true motive for summoning Paul more frequently to converse with him; he hoped Paul would give him money to be released. Few people are aware that many if not most judges accept bribes. I have no doubt that many unjust decisions by rulers and judges are a result of bribery. In fact, many if not most lobbyists of government employ bribes to get favorable legislation. There are many clever ways they can bribe without it seeming illegal. For example, campaign contributions and promises of voter support are commonly done. Truth and justice are considered incidental to the process of governing. And that is even more true of our corrupted court system.

A new governor

- **But two years having been fulfilled, Felix received a successor, Porcius Festus. And wanting to lay down favors to the Jews, Felix left behind Paul bound. Festus therefore having entered into the province, after three days he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the high priest and the principal men of the Jews appeared to him against Paul, and urged him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem, making an ambush to kill him on the way** (Acts 24:27-25:3).

I often lament the extreme slowness of our judicial system, even though our federal constitution guarantees swiftness. But the above passage shows the practice of delaying justice is ancient. There are many reasons to delay passing judgment, but virtually all of them are designed to defeat justice. And Felix was certainly unjust to keep Paul in custody for so long without making a judgment. The record indicates he had two reasons to delay. One was his hope for a bribe from Paul. The other one was to lay down favors to the Jews, because the longer Paul was in custody the longer he was prevented from evangelizing.

No reason was given why Felix was replaced by Festus. Hence, the reason had no significance. Nevertheless, there was significance in having a new governor. For it gave occasion for the rulers of the Jews to request Paul be brought to Jerusalem.

It would have been very convenient to the Jews if Paul were brought to Jerusalem. The new governor was already there, and the rulers would not need to make the journey to Caesarea. Moreover, those rulers were at home in Jerusalem. Those may have been some of the arguments they gave Festus in their appeal to have Paul brought there. Nevertheless, the real reason was because they still wanted to kill Paul by ambush. Those Jews were just as lawless toward Christ and his church as ever.

Paul appears before the new governor

- **Indeed therefore Festus answered to keep Paul in Caesarea, and he himself was going to go out quickly. Therefore he says, Let the able men among**

you, after coming down together, accuse him if there is anything in this man. And after remaining among them more than ten days, having gone down to Caesarea, on the morrow having sat on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought (Acts 25:4-6).

Although those Jews were more at home in Jerusalem, Festus was more at home in Caesarea. And since Festus was leaving Jerusalem quickly, he told the Jews to send able men to accuse Paul. Notice how Festus added. “... **if there is anything in this man.**” With those words he was informing the Jews that they would need to convince him of Paul’s guilt.

Although Festus said he was going to go out quickly, nevertheless, he remained among the Jews more than ten days. That either means he exaggerated in order to put off the Jews, or his meaning of quickly was not the same as ours. Of course, our corrupt modern judicial system would certainly say ten days was quick, very quick. Although Festus was with the Jews in Jerusalem for ten days before coming to Caesarea, he sat in judgment about Paul on the day after arriving there.

The Jews accuse but he denies

- **And when he arrived, the Jews who came down from Jerusalem stood around, bringing many and serious accusations against Paul, which they could not prove, while he was defending, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I transgressed anything (Acts 25:7-8).**

No details about that hearing with Festus are given. Apparently therefore, the Jews added nothing new to their accusations. Neither did they bring new evidence or witnesses to corroborate what they said. That meant they could not prove their case against Paul. Consequently, Paul only had to deny any kind of guilt.

Paul appeals Caesar

- **But Festus, wanting to lay down a favor to the Jews, having answered Paul, said, Are thou willing, after going up to Jerusalem, to be judged there about these things before me?**
- **But Paul said, I am standing at the judgment seat of Caesar, where I ought to be judged. I did nothing wrong Jewish, as thou also very well know. For if I am indeed wrong, and have done anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die, but if there is nothing of what these men accuse me, no man can give me to them freely. I appeal Caesar.**
- **Then Festus, when he conferred with the council, answered, Thou have appealed Caesar, to Caesar thou will go (Acts 25:9-12).**

Festus also wanted to lay down a favor to the Jews. Hence, he agreed to try Paul at Jerusalem. Those Roman governors wanted to give favors to the rulers of the Jews because they

could help them maintain peace and order. And for the Roman empire that was apparently the most important part of their occupations.

Felix must not have told Festus about the earlier threat of an ambush against Paul. For Festus was quite willing to send Paul to Jerusalem. Remember, the rulers wanted him sent there so he could be ambushed and killed. And such an ambush would have threatened the lives of all the soldiers who would bring Paul.

Nevertheless, Paul refused to go, and instead appealed Caesar, which was his right as a Roman citizen. Paul no doubt remembered the earlier threat of ambush, and he could have informed Festus. However, he accused Festus of knowing that Paul was not guilty of anything wrong Jewish, meaning they had no grounds to accuse him. Paul also said that no man could give him to them freely.

Those were strong words made to the governor. The record does not say Festus was hoping for a bribe, but Paul was probably weary of being a pawn for favors. And he was no doubt also tired of waiting to be released. And since the Lord had told Paul he must also testify about him in Rome, Paul decided his best choice was to appeal Caesar, who was in Rome. Paul must have hoped he could testify in Rome as a free man, but those rulers of the Jews together with the Roman governors kept preventing it.

The council Festus consulted was no doubt a Roman one stationed at Caesarea. After a consultation with them Festus agreed to send Paul. By so doing he could no longer do a favor to the Jews about Paul, but it did give Festus a good excuse to rid himself of that awkward case.

The king arrives and hears about Paul

- **Now some days having passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, greeting Festus. And as he was remaining there more days, Festus declared to the king the things concerning Paul, saying, There is a certain man who was left behind a prisoner by Felix, about whom, when I became in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews revealed, asking judgment against him.**
- **To whom I answered, that it is not a custom by Romans to give any man freely for destruction, before the man being accused has the accusers in person, and receives an occasion of defense about the accusation.**
- **When therefore they assembled here, not having made one delay, next in order, having sat on the judgment seat, I commanded the man to be brought. About whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought not one cause of what I supposed, but had certain issues against him about his own religion, and about a certain Jesus, who has died, whom Paul was claiming to be alive.**
- **And I, being uncertain of the controversy about this man, asked whether he wants to go to Jerusalem and be judged there about these things. But when Paul appealed to be kept for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to**

be kept until I might send him to Caesar. And Agrippa said to Festus, I also want to hear the man myself. And tomorrow, he says, thou will hear him (Acts 25:13-22).

Agrippa was a great grandson of the first Herod. Bernice was Herod's widowed sister. Since governor Festus was under his authority, Agrippa no doubt wanted to meet with him. And while he was there Festus took the opportunity to tell him about Paul. After hearing about the case Agrippa wanted to also meet Paul.

Notice how Festus described the policy of Romans regarding every man accused of a capital offense. And that policy applied to all men, not just to Roman citizens. Remember, the Jewish rulers could not crucify Jesus without getting permission from Pilate the Roman governor.

Festus also confessed to Agrippa that Paul was not guilty of any Roman crime. For his accusations were only about his religion and about the man Jesus who died but Paul claimed was alive. Festus conveniently omitted his desire to lay down a favor to the Jews and have a trial at Jerusalem

Making favors in court cases is clearly a violation of justice, and Festus knew it. And he probably doubted Agrippa would have been sympathetic, even if it would have strengthened Festus' relationship with the rulers of the Jews. That would have been especially true when Agrippa learned that Paul was a Roman. Moreover, in this world of hypocrisy, being candid about your ulterior motives is always considered like taking your clothes off in public.

Great pomp

- **Therefore on the morrow, Agrippa and Bernice having come with great pomp, and having entered into the courtroom, and with the chief captains and the men of prominence who were of the city, and Festus who commanded, Paul was brought in** (Acts 25:23).

Jesus had nothing good to say about the pomp of men, because their pomp is deceptive. Consider this passage in the Old Testament: **"Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. In the balances they will go up. They are together lighter than vanity"** (Psalm 62:9). That scripture is about the two extremes of men, both of which are not good.

Men of low degree must labor and struggle just to survive. And without hope in Christ their lives are a vanity, full of pain and sorrows with little pleasure. Men of high degree are a lie because no man is worth how much they elevate themselves. Their pomp is deceitful. It is used to aggrandize themselves before others. It is like the extravagant apparel they wear. Underneath they are little different from ordinary men.

Remember how Jesus contrasted the rulers of the Gentiles with his disciples: **"Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman"** (Matthew 20:25-27).

The great pomp and ceremony of the Catholic church and its rulers is more evidence of how far away they are from the authentic church of Christ.

How the Jews hated Paul

- **And Festus says, King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, ye see this man about whom all the multitude of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, shouting he ought not to live any longer (Acts 25:24).**

That passage shows the depth of hatred the great majority of Jews had for Paul. And they still have hatred of him. Like the rest of the world they hate Paul because they hate Jesus Christ and his church—the genuine Christ and his church, not the mythical Christ they have invented for themselves. They hate our Lord and Savior because they hate the Lord God himself. They hate God because they love sin and wickedness. What piety they may display is hypocritical. For their behavior and the fruits of it exposes them.

The governor explains his problem

- **But I, having understood him to have done nothing worthy of death, and also him, this man, having appealed Augustus I decided to send him. About whom I do not have anything certain to write to the lord. Therefore I brought him before you, and especially before thee, King Agrippa, so that, an examination having occurred, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, sending a prisoner, and not to specify the causes against him (Acts 25:25-27).**

Festus knew that Paul was innocent of any crime. Yet he was sending him to Caesar Augustus as a prisoner. That posed a serious dilemma for Festus, because it was unreasonable to send a prisoner without having any charges against him. Festus created that dilemma for himself because he could have released Paul, knowing he was innocent. It was his desire to lay down a favor for the Jews that put Festus in that dilemma. Notice however, Festus conveniently failed to mention that part of the story. It would certainly have been embarrassing to him, and fatal to his leadership.

Paul was grateful for Agrippa

- **And Agrippa said to Paul, It is permitted thee to speak for thyself. Then Paul, having stretched forth his hand, made a defense. Concerning all things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself blessed, being about to make my defense before thee today. Especially thee, being an expert of all things regarding Jews, both habits and issues. Therefore I beg thee to hear me patiently (Acts 26:1-3).**

As both Tertullus and Paul had done with Felix, Paul began his defense by complimenting Agrippa. Paul said he was blessed because Agrippa was “**an expert of all things regarding Jews, both habits and issues.**” When an accused man is innocent it is much easier for

him to speak to judges who are knowledgeable about the issues of his case. It is much more difficult when judges must have everything explained to them, especially when the issues are complex, as they were in the case of Paul. Therefore, Paul expressed his pleasure that Agrippa would hear him.

Paul had always been a faithful Pharisee

- **Indeed therefore, my manner of life from youth, having developed from the beginning among my nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know, having known me previously from the beginning, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I lived a Pharisee (Acts 26:4-5).**

After complimenting Agrippa, Paul began his defense by testifying of his strict obedience to his religion. And he pointed out that he had always been well known that way among the Jews. Every religion varies in how much its believers practice it. Such practices range from very loose and casual to very strict and exacting. Paul lived very strictly as a Pharisee. He had never been loose or rebellious.

He is being judged for the hope they have

- **And now for the hope of the promise made by God to the fathers, I stand being judged, to which our twelve tribes, serving in earnestness night and day, hope to attain, about which hope, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God raises the dead? (Acts 26:6-8).**

Paul then pointed out the irony of his accusations. It was for the very hope of the promise made by God to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) that he was being judged. It was the very hope for which the twelve tribes of Israel served in earnest night and day hoping to attain. That was the very reason he was being judged.

Paul then asked why they judged it incredible for God to raise the dead. Those Jews could not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead, even though the evidence was overwhelming because of the large number of witnesses.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, **“For I delivered to you at first what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he arose on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also slept. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the untimely birth, he also appeared to me”** (First Corinthians 15:3-8).

The law of Moses said that the testimony of two or three witnesses was to be considered valid. The risen Jesus had appeared to over five hundred men at once, besides having appeared to some others on different occasions. Yet those Jews refused to believe it, considering it incredible.

He persecuted the disciples of Jesus

- **Indeed therefore I thought it necessary for myself to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which also I did at Jerusalem. And I locked up many of the sanctified in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were killed, I gave a vote against them. And punishing them often at all the synagogues, I compelled them to blaspheme. And being extraordinarily furious toward them, I persecuted them even as far as to outside cities (Acts 26:9-11).**

Paul then told how he had opposed the name of Jesus and severely persecuted his disciples. He even voted to have them killed. And perhaps worst of all he compelled them to blaspheme, because what Paul no doubt meant was compelling them to blaspheme Jesus. For that destroys the hope of their faith.

One of the major issues of the church has always been how to react to disciples who blaspheme during times of persecution, and then later repent. To forgive and receive them back as if nothing happened would make blasphemy seem insignificant. And it would encourage blasphemy as an easy way to escape persecution while losing nothing in the church afterward. I speak much more about forgiveness and punishment in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

He tells about his vision of Jesus

- **And during which, while going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the road a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, which shone around me and those who went with me. And when we all fell to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.**
- **And I said, Who are thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and stand upon thy feet, for I appeared to thee for this, to appoint thee an assistant and a witness both of things that thou saw, and of the things that I will make visible to thee, delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes to turn about from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, for them to receive remission of sins and a lot among those who have been sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:12-18).**

No doubt Paul had described that vision many times to many people. However, the Bible only records two times when Paul described it. The first time was when he was giving his defense before the mob in Jerusalem. And the second time was when he was giving his defense to Agrippa.

The first description is, of course, the one given when the book was describing Paul's journey to Damascus. Here is what it said: **"And on going, it came to pass for him to**

approach Damascus. And suddenly there shone around him a light out of heaven. And after falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? And he said, Who are thou, Lord?

“And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and enter into the city, and it will be told thee what thou must do. And the men who traveled with him had stopped, speechless, indeed hearing the voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the ground. And when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. But they brought him into Damascus, leading him by the hand” (Acts 9:3-8).

Here is Paul’s first recorded description of that event (his description before the mob); “And there happened to me, while going and approaching Damascus about noon, suddenly to flash forth from heaven a great light around me. And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? And I answered, Who are thou, Lord?

“And he said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom thou persecute. And those who were with me indeed saw the light and became afraid, but they heard not the voice of him who spoke to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, After rising, go into Damascus, and there it will be told thee about all things that have been assigned for thee to do. And as I was not seeing from the splendor of that light, I came into Damascus, being led by hand by those who accompanied me” (Acts 22:6-11).

Below is a word-for-word comparison of those three descriptions:

ORIGINAL: And on going, it came to pass for him to approach Damascus. And suddenly there shone around him a light out of heaven.

To the mob: And there happened to me, while going and approaching Damascus about noon, suddenly to flash forth from heaven a great light around me.

To Agrippa: And during which, while going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the road a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, which shone around me and those who went with me.

ORIGINAL: And after falling to the ground ...

To the mob: And I fell to the ground ...

To Agrippa: And when we all fell to the ground ...

ORIGINAL: he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me?

To the mob: and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me?

To Agrippa: I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.

ORIGINAL: And he said, Who are thou, Lord?

To the mob: And I answered, Who are thou, Lord?

To Agrippa: **And I said, Who are thou, Lord?**

ORIGINAL: **And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and enter into the city, and it will be told thee what thou must do.**

To the mob: **And he said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom thou persecute.**

To Agrippa: **And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute. But arise, and stand upon thy feet, for I appeared to thee for this, to appoint thee an assistant and a witness both of things that thou saw, and of the things that I will make visible to thee, delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes to turn about from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, for them to receive remission of sins and a lot among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.**

ORIGINAL: **And the men who traveled with him had stopped, speechless, indeed hearing the voice, but seeing no man.**

To the mob: **And those who were with me indeed saw the light and became afraid, but they heard not the voice of him who spoke to me.**

To Agrippa: (no description)

ORIGINAL: (no description)

To the mob: **And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, After rising, go into Damascus, and there it will be told thee about all things that have been assigned for thee to do.**

To Agrippa: (no description)

ORIGINAL: **And Saul arose from the ground. And when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. But they brought him into Damascus, leading him by the hand.**

To the mob: **And as I was not seeing from the splendor of that light, I came into Damascus, being led by hand by those who accompanied me.**

To Agrippa: (no description)

Comparing those three reports, they all agree that it happen while Paul was going to Damascus. Although the original said they were approaching Damascus, and the description to mob added that it was about noon.

They all agree about the light out of heaven. However, the original simply calls it a light, while Paul's description to the mob said it was a great light, and his description to Agrippa said it was above the brightness of the sun.

They agree about the falling. However, the original simply mentions falling to the ground, while his description to the mob says he fell to the ground, and the description to Agrippa said they all fell to the ground.

They all agree about the voice saying, **"Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me?"** However, his description to Agrippa added that the words were in the Hebrew language. It also added the words, **"It is hard for thee to kick against the goads."**

They all agree that Paul responded, **"Who are thou, Lord?"**

They all agree that the voice then said, **“I am Jesus whom thou persecute.”** Although his description to the mob said **“Jesus the Nazarene,”** instead of just Jesus. Paul’s description to Agrippa added much more, telling how Saul (Paul) why Jesus had appeared to him.

A description about the men with Paul is only given in the original and in the one to the mob. And they differ slightly in their details. The major difference between the two descriptions is about the voice. The original one said the men with him heard the voice but saw no man. However, Paul’s description to the mob said they heard not the voice. Scoffers love to seize upon such things and call them contradictions. However, Solomon said of them, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding”** (Proverbs 14:6). No man can be a scoffer and gain wisdom.

If you are a man of understanding and want to gain knowledge, then the differences about hearing the voice can easily be explained to you. The men with Paul heard the voice, but they did not hear what was said. I have a severe hearing disability. I often hear people speaking but I cannot hear (understand) what they are saying, even with my hearing aids, and even though they are speaking in my native English language.

Paul’s description to the mob also told how he asked the Lord what he should do. It also told of the instructions the Lord gave him about going to Damascus where he would be told about all the things that were assigned for him to do. The other two descriptions omit those things from the story.

The last part of the story is only told in the original and in Paul’s description to the mob. And they differ in their details. The original said that Paul arose from the ground but was unable to see. His description to the mob said he was unable to see because of the splendor of the light. They both mention how he was led by the hand into Damascus.

Paul’s description to Agrippa gave more detail about what Jesus said to Paul in that vision. However, it omitted everything that happened after that, saying nothing about the actions of the other men, or about Paul’s blindness, or how he was brought into Damascus. Those details were irrelevant to the significance of that vision to Paul’s future life as an apostle of Jesus. And that was obviously what Paul wanted to emphasize in his defense before Agrippa.

Those remaining details given in the other two descriptions are important parts of the story for a general audience, such as the readers of the book of Acts and the mob at Jerusalem that was listening to Paul.

Regarding these words that Jesus said to Paul, **“It is hard for thee to kick against the goads,”** they are never explained. However, it is my belief that Jesus was referring to Paul’s conscience. For Paul was a very righteous man, and there is no doubt he was greatly affected by how much suffering he was imposing upon those humble people. They were not criminals; they were the sheep of Christ. And that must have troubled his conscience. Those were the goads that Paul was kicking against.

His compassion for those suffering souls was telling him to stop, but his misguided zeal for God caused him to fight against those feelings. And that was hard for him. Indeed, his conscience tormented him for the rest of his life. For Paul later called himself the least of the apostles because of what he had done: **“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by**

the grace of God I am what I am. And his grace for me did not become empty, but I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (First Corinthians 15:9-10).

Nevertheless, notice how Paul did not allow that early failure to defeat him, but instead he used it to drive him to labor more abundantly. Therefore, let not failures cause you to quit trying. Use the memories of those failures to motivate you to labor even more abundantly, as Paul did with his.

Perhaps what kept Paul persecuting the disciples of Jesus was passages like this one about the sinful people of the promised land that Jehovah had commanded the sons of Israel to exterminate: **"And thou shall consume all the peoples that Jehovah thy God shall deliver to thee. Thine eye shall not pity them"** (Deuteronomy 7:16). Their eyes were not to pity them. In Paul's eyes those Christians were to receive no pity.

I want to point out that the peoples that Jehovah commanded to be exterminated with no pity were the most wretched of sinners, as Jehovah explained to Moses: **"Do not defile ye yourselves in any of these things. For in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out from before you, and the land is defiled. Therefore I visit the iniquity of it upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. Ye therefore shall keep my statutes and my ordinances, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the home-born, nor the stranger that sojourns among you, (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and the land is defiled), that the land not vomit you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you"** (Leviticus 18:24-28).

In complete contrast, the disciples of Jesus whom Paul was persecuting so severely were the most righteous souls. For Jesus had commanded us, **"Ye therefore shall be perfect, even as your Father in the heavens is perfect"** (Matthew 5:48). Unbeknownst to Paul the high priests who sent Paul out to oppose the disciples of Jesus were the wretched sinners that he should have been opposing, which he later did when he learned the truth.

Paul preached the promised Christ

- **Whereupon, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declaring first to those at Damascus and then at Jerusalem, and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and return to God, doing works worthy of repentance** (Acts 26:19-20).

One of the great things about Paul was that he was a humble man. He had originally striven zealously against what he thought was a false religion in Israel. He thought he was serving God well. That vision told him he was living a lie. What could have been more humbling to him? Yet he fully accepted what the Lord told him, and he did a complete reversal toward the good news of Christ. He did not argue or criticize. He obeyed fully.

When he spoke before Agrippa, Paul not only defended himself against the false charges against him, but he also taught about the good news of Christ. That good news is available to both Jews and Gentiles. And it involves repentance and returning to God, which also means doing works worthy of repentance. Repentance without worthy works is useless. In fact, it is a false repentance.

He spoke what had been prophesied

- **Because of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, tried to grasp and kill me. Having therefore experienced the help from God, I stand to this day solemnly declaring both to small and great, saying nothing apart from what both the prophets and Moses said was going to happen, that the suffering Christ, since first from a resurrection of the dead, is going to proclaim light to our people and to the nations (Acts 26:21-23).**

Paul wanted Agrippa to know that was the real reason he had been seized in the temple by the Jews and attacked. It was the simple matter of believing the things that had been prophesied or not. Paul believed the prophecies and the fulfillment of them, while the Jews did not. What made it difficult for the Jews to believe, was that Christ would suffer, be resurrected from the dead, and proclaim light not only to the Jews but to all peoples.

The Jews had the misconception that the Christ would be a mighty warrior-king like David, who would deliver them from the Roman occupation, and create a glorious new Israel for them. They could not accept a suffering Christ, even knowing the prophecies.

Perhaps the most famous one about the suffering Christ is found in the book of Isaiah (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). The Jews claim that passage describes their nation, and not the Messiah. Read it for yourself and you will see how ridiculous such a claim is. Moreover, not only could they not accept a suffering Christ, but the Jews of that generation had an intense hatred of Gentiles. Hence, they could not accept the idea that the kingdom of God would contain both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Regarding all those prophecies, the Old Testament scriptures contain many of them. Moreover, there have been whole books written listing them all. Hence, I refer you to them if you want to know what they are.

Festus accuses Paul of being mad

- **And while he made a defense by these things, Festus said in a loud voice, Paul, thou are mad. Much scholarship is driving thee into madness (Acts 26:24).**

Why would Festus interrupt Paul with that loud accusation? First Paul claimed to have a vision from heaven that told him to go against his previous beliefs. Then he spoke of a resurrection of the dead. Remember the reaction of the Athenians when Paul mentioned the resurrection: **“... when they heard the resurrection of the dead, of course they mocked, but others said, We will hear thee again about this”** (Acts 17:32). For most men of that age what Paul said and did would have been judged crazy.

In his earlier trials Paul had not spoken so candidly. All he did was deny the accusations of the Jews, and show how they could not prove them. This time however, Paul was much more specific about his beliefs. And he explains why in the next passage.

Festus attributed Paul's “madness” to his much scholarship. Paul was known as a highly educated man. Wise men are often so far ahead in their thinking that they risk alienating other men, because for the average man there are many things about truth and knowledge

that seem strange to them. Indeed, Solomon warned, **“Be not over-righteous, nor show thyself too wise. Why should thou destroy thyself?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

I once read somewhere what someone said about successful theories: First, people say they are ridiculous, secondly, they say they are obvious, and thirdly, they say everybody always knew it. The German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, also said, “All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident.”

Therefore ye wise men, be careful how you reveal your wisdom, lest you appear strange and other men flee from you. Be sure you have a good cause before revealing your wisdom, as Paul did.

Paul tells why he spoke boldly to them

- **But Paul says, I am not mad, eminent Festus, but I speak forth sayings of truth and soberness. For the king knows about these things, before whom I also speak boldly. For I am convinced not any of these things, nothing, to be hidden from him. For this was not done in a corner.**
- **King Agrippa, do thou believe the prophets? I know that thou believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, By a little thou persuade me to become a Christian. And Paul said, I ever pray to God, both by little and by much, not only thee, but also all who hear me this day, to become such kind as I also am, apart from these bonds** (Acts 26:25-29).

What Festus thought were crazy ideas were in fact sayings of truth and soberness. And dear reader, the world thinks the teachings of the Bible, when they are proclaimed truthfully and accurately, are crazy. Yet they are indeed words of truth and soberness. I could give numerous examples. Just consider what they think about God creating the world in six days, or about Eve being created out of Adam’s rib, or that Jesus was Jehovah God of the Old Testament, or that he walked on water. The world dismisses the Bible as being filled with myths, and they think whoever believes them is crazy.

Paul spoke boldly because he knew that Agrippa knew about those things and he believed the Old Testament record. Agrippa knew because those things were not done in a corner. The actions of Jesus were widely known among the Jews. Even Herod had heard about the wonders Jesus was performing.

Agrippa confessed Paul’s ability to persuade. Remember how Felix responded to Paul’s teachings about Christ: **“And after some days, Felix having arrived with Drusilla, his wife being Jewish, he summoned Paul, and heard him about the faith in Christ. And as he discoursed about righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment going to be, Felix, having become afraid, answered, Go now, and having a convenient time, I will summon thee”** (Acts 24:24-25).

How serious Agrippa was about Christ is never told. For after the next passage the Bible says nothing more about him. Remember how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (see Matthew 19:23-24). And the same thing is no doubt true of men who have great worldly power.

Paul proudly confessed his faith in Christ, and he committed his life to create faith in all men. I rejoice exceedingly that there have been men like Peter and Paul who remained faithful, working to promote the good news of Christ. There is so much Paul could have gained among the Jews if he had not. He was a marvelous example of a man losing his life for Christ so that he could find it, find life eternal.

Paul could have been released

- **And when he spoke these things, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and those who sat with them. And having withdrawn, they spoke to each other, saying, This man does nothing worthy of death or of bonds. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been released, if he had not appealed Caesar (Acts 26:30-32).**

Unlike Felix and Festus, Agrippa was not interested in doing favors for the Jews. He was interested only in the justice of Paul's accusations. And it was obvious to him, and to the other men, that Paul was innocent of anything worthy of death or even of bondage.

However, Paul could not be released because he had appealed Caesar. Apparently once such an appeal had been made and accepted, it could not be rescinded. That rule was probably made to discourage frequent or frivolous appeals to the emperor. Once made, the man was bound to complete the process. Hence, Paul had no choice but to continue with the appeal.

They sail for Italy

- **And when it was determined for us to sail for Italy, they delivered both Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the band of Augustus. And having gotten on a ship of Adramyttium that was going to sail to the places along Asia, we launched, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And on another day we put in at Sidon. And Julius, who treated Paul kindly, allowed him to undergo care, after going to his friends.**
- **And having launched from there, we sailed under lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And having sailed across the depths along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, of Lycia. And there, the centurion having found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy, he put us in it.**
- **And sailing slowly during considerable days, and with difficulty having come along the Cnidus, the wind not allowing us further, we sailed under lee of Crete, along Salmone. And sailing by it with difficulty, we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near to which was Lasea City (Acts 27:1-8).**

Notice how the text says that it was determined for *us*. That means Luke, the author of this book of Acts, was traveling with Paul. The text also says there were other prisoners as well

as Paul who were being taken by the centurion. However, nothing is said about who those prisoners were.

Adramyttium was a sea port of the city of Mysia which was in the northwestern part of the province of Asia. That port was not on the way to Rome; it was too far out of the way. It was the ship from Adramyttium that the centurion chose because it was going to sail to the places along Asia on the way to Rome.

After one day of sailing they arrived at Sidon, which was on the coast about eighty-five miles north of Caesarea. After that they sailed past on the lee side of Cyprus because of the contrary winds. Cilicia and Pamphylia were provinces on the south side of Asia Minor. Myra was a seaport in the province of Lycia, which was just to the west of Pamphylia.

Alexandria was a major city on the northern coast of Egypt. That ship from there was sailing for Italy. Hence, the centurion put Paul and the other men in that ship from the one that was continuing on to Adramyttium.

Cnidus was a city over a hundred and fifty miles west of Myra. It was on the south coast of Asia. Crete is a large island about the size of Cyprus. It was about a hundred miles southwest of Cnidus. Salmone is a promontory on the far east side of Crete. Fair Havens was a seaport on the south side of Crete about half way in the middle of it. Lasea City was about five miles east of Fair Havens.

The text says, that because of contrary winds they sailed under lee of both Cyprus and Crete. However, the lee of Cyprus may have been on the north side, while the lee of Crete was on the south side. Sea travel in those days was either by man-powered oaring or more commonly by sailing from the winds. Hence, the winds were a big determining factor in their navigation.

Paul warns of the danger

- **And considerable time having past, and the voyage now being dangerous, also because the Fast was now past, Paul urged, saying to them, Men, I perceive that the voyage is going to be with injury and much damage, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives (Acts 27:9-10).**

Remember, the record says they had contrary winds when they sailed past both Cyprus and Crete. Hence, they had encountered considerable contrary winds already. The Fast that Paul referred to was the annual fast commanded by the law of Moses. During the day of atonement all of the people were required to fast. Modern Jews call it Yom Kipper. But they have modified it considerably from what Moses commanded. The Day of Atonement was to be held in early August. The specific date varied from year to year because the sons of Israel used a lunar calendar. You can read much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Paul would not have warned about their plans for the voyage if the danger of sailing at that time of year was not so serious. Paul did not say he had received that warning from God, which I am certain he would have done if he had. Nevertheless, Paul's judgment was correct, because as the record tells next, the continued voyage proved to be a disaster for the ship. Although their lives were spared.

The decision to sail

- **But the centurion was convinced more by the captain and the shipmaster than to those things spoken by Paul. And since the haven was inconvenient to winter in, the majority gave counsel to launch from there also, if somehow they might be able, after arriving at Phoenix, to winter in a haven of Crete, looking toward southwest and northwest.**
- **And when a south wind blew gently, having presumed to have obtained their purpose, after taking up anchor, they sailed very near by Crete (Acts 27:11-13).**

Paul was not an experience seaman. However, he had often traveled by sea, and he had no doubt learned much about sailing. The captain of the ship and the shipmaster differed in their opinion from Paul, and they convinced the centurion to proceed with the sail.

As in modern times, the shipmaster was no doubt under the command of the Captain. However, he was probably the navigator as well as the manager of the ship's internal activities. Hence, he had much influence on decisions about sailing the ship. Nevertheless, the centurion had the ultimate authority, and took the advice of the captain and the shipmaster instead of Paul's.

Phoenix was a seaport of Crete that was about fifty miles west of Fair Havens. Its harbor faced east. The text says it was looking southwest and northwest, but those words are not well understood. It may mean that the harbor offered protection against winds coming either from the southwest or the northwest. And since winter storms usually come from the northwest, it would have made a good haven in which to remain until Spring.

Like so many bad and dangerous things, the winds were deceptively gentle when they first departed. Nevertheless, they knew the risk they were taking, and so they sailed very near the shore.

Caught in a cyclonic storm

- **But not long after, there threw against it a cyclonic wind called the Euroclydon. And the ship having been caught, and not being able to face the wind, having given up, we were driven. And having sailed under lee of a certain island called Claudia, we were able with difficulty, to develop control of the skiff.**
- **And having taken that up, they used helps, undergirding the ship. And fearing lest they might fall off into the sandbank, having lowered the vessel, they were driven this way (Acts 27:14-17).**

The most violent storms are virtually always cyclonic. Hurricanes and tornados are the most destructive. However, common winter storms are usually also cyclonic. They bring strong winds down from the north. The one referred to in the passage was a cyclonic storm bringing winds down from Europe, which is north of Crete. Hence the name Euroclydon.

It was a fierce storm and obviously struck swiftly, which is common with most strong storms. It happened so quickly they did not even have a chance to drop anchor and ride it out. It drove them away from Crete into deep waters, too deep to anchor. For the sea between Crete and Claudia is over a mile deep. Claudia is a small island about twenty-five miles south of Crete.

They sailed under the lee of Claudia to protect them from the strong winds. However, strong winds can still buffet a ship even under the lee of land. That is especially true if the waters were still deep. And since the text says they sailed with difficulty, that was obviously the situation with them.

Large ships always carry something like a skiff in order to go on shore after anchoring. The helps they used to undergird the ship were probably ropes. Since large ships in those days were made of planks, they could use ropes to wrap completely around the hull in order to help hold all the planks together during stormy weather. That was completely necessary because the violent buffeting of the ship would have twisted the hull back and forth eventually tearing it apart. The helps were designed to stiffen the hull and prevent that.

They obviously were unable to control the direction of the ship. And since there was a sandbank in that area, they used the vessel to help control the ship. That vessel was no doubt what we call a sea anchor. It consists of a large bucket that is dragged in the water behind ships with a rope to act like a brake to help stabilize them.

Storm-tossed for more days

- **And since we were exceedingly storm-tossed, on the next day they jettisoned. And the third day we cast out by hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars appeared for more days, and no small storm laying on, all remaining hope for us to be saved was taken away (Acts 27:18-20).**

The strong low atmospheric pressure of that storm brought heavy cloud cover, which is true of all such storms. And the violence of the storm was so great that they began reducing the weight of the ship by jettisoning many things from it. Moreover, the violence of it lasted so long that they gave up hope of ever being saved. Being in a helpless situation where you are constantly being tossed about is extremely stressful. Being in a storm tossed ship means you are constantly in motion. And only seasoned sailors ever become adapted to it.

Paul encourages them

- **And being long without food, then Paul, who stood in the midst of them, said, Ye truly ought, O men, to have complied with me, not to launch from Crete, and gain this damage and loss. And now I exhort you to cheer up, for there will not be one loss of life from you, except of the ship.**
- **For there stood by me this night an agent of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul. Thou must stand before Caesar, and lo, God**

has granted thee all those sailing with thee. Therefore men, cheer up, for I believe God, that it will be so in that way it has been told to me. But we must fall off upon a certain island (Acts 27:21-26).

Paul reminded them of his warning about sailing so late in the year. He needed to remind them so they would be more inclined to listen to him. For he was now giving them good news about their plight. This time God had spoken to Paul about their journey. He spoke to him through one of his heavenly agents.

Paul then told the people what God had revealed to him. Paul also mentioned how he belonged to God and he served him. God assured Paul that he would survive the storm and stand before Caesar. Moreover, Paul was told that all those sailing with him would be spared. Paul then told how he believed God through the words of his agent. He also predicted they would fall off upon a certain island.

Preparing for land

- **And when it became the fourteenth night, as we were driven about in the Adriatic sea, toward midnight the sailors suspected some region to come near them. And having tossed lead, they found twenty fathoms, and having gone a little farther, and having tossed lead again, they found fifteen fathoms. And fearing lest somehow we might falloff on rough places, having cast off four anchors from the stern, they prayed for day to develop (Acts 27:27-29).**

The Adriatic sea is located on the east side of Italy. It is only about fifty miles wide where it connects with the Mediterranean sea at its southern end. The ship could not have been there because they landed on the island of Malta the following day. And Malta is about four hundred miles southwest of the Adriatic sea. Obviously therefore, the Adriatic sea as it was then defined included much more than it does now.

That passage says they had been storm tossed fourteen days, a full two weeks. That was indeed a remarkable storm. It was either a single cyclonic storm that become stationary over the Mediterranean sea, or it was a wave of storms that came quickly one after another. I suspect it was the latter.

Experienced sailors can often hear when they are approaching land by the sounds of the waves that break upon the shore. Being midnight and cloudy they could not have seen much of anything. A fathom is six feet. Hence the sea floor went from one hundred twenty feet to ninety feet. That was a sure sign they were fast approaching land. Hence, they cast off four anchors from the stern. They probably used that many because they were still being driven by the winds. After that all they could do is pray for daylight, which was yet hours away.

The sailors sought to flee the ship

- **And since the sailors sought to flee out of the ship, and having lowered the skiff into the sea in pretense as going to stretch out anchors from the bow,**

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Unless these men remain in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff, and let it fall off (Acts 27:30-32).

Those sailors knew how dangerous it was to be on the ship if it wrecked on the rocks. Being cowardly and selfish they attempted to escape on the skiff rather than remain and help the others. There have been modern reports of sailors doing exactly that when their ship was in grave danger.

Those ancient sailors tried to conceal what they were doing, but Paul knew. How he knew is not told, but he may have been suspicious and was watching them carefully. Paul had great insight in the character of people, even without direct divine guidance. And they may have revealed the kind of men they were during the ordeal.

After Paul warned the centurion and the soldiers about the attempted escape they intervened to prevent it. The centurion and the soldiers were no doubt angered by the cowardice of those sailors. Remember, the ship was from Alexandria in Egypt, so those sailors may have been Egyptians. The Egyptians had for centuries been a mighty nation. However, because of their sinfulness God punished them.

Here is part of what the prophet Ezekiel said happened to Egypt: **“And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of the countries that are desolate. And her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be a desolation forty years. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries.**

“For thus says the lord Jehovah: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples where they were scattered, and I will bring back the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their birth. And they shall be a base kingdom there. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms, nor shall it lift itself up any more above the nations. And I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations” (Ezekiel 29:12-15).

Jehovah said that Egypt would be **“the basest of the kingdoms.”** The nature of a nation is primarily dependent upon the character of its people. Modern humanists deny that fact, but history is filled with evidence of its truth. Indeed, what they commonly call primitive peoples are either undeveloped or degenerate peoples. For after the flood mankind were all descendants of Noah and his sons. Noah and his sons were noble and righteous, which is why God spared them.

The generations that followed Noah and his sons gradually migrated throughout the world. Some rose to greatness, while others remained undeveloped or descended into barbarism and decadence. The Egyptians had risen to greatness, but then became a base people. And they remain a base people to this day. Hence, those sailors from Egypt were cowardly and selfish.

Greece was once a great nation, but it too has become a base people. An example showing that was what happened recently on a Greek cruise ship. It was sinking in stormy weather. But instead of helping the passengers, the Greek captain and crew abandoned them and used the available life rafts for themselves to escape the ship. The ship was listing so badly all the life rafts could not be used.

Here is the first part of a news report of that event from Encyclopedia.com: “Irate passengers rescued from a cruise ship that sank Sunday in stormy seas off the east coast of South Africa complained bitterly today that the ship's captain and crew abandoned them and said their evacuation was organized entirely by the ship's entertainers and staff of the tour company that chartered the Greek-registered liner.” The captain and the crew were all Greeks. The tour company was from South Africa. Those modern Greek sailors were of the same character as those ancient Egyptians sailors on the ship with Paul.

Paul urges them all to eat

- **And until day was going to develop, Paul urged them all to partake of food, saying, Today is the fourteenth day, waiting, ye continue without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I encourage you to take of food, for this is for your safety. For not a hair will fall from the head of one of you (Acts 27:33-34).**

I think by this time Paul was highly respected by the soldiers and the passengers. His predictions had all proven true. And now he was very encouraging, telling them that none of them would be harmed. Saying not a hair would fall from the head of one of them was, of course, a figurative expression.

It is remarkable that those people had not eaten anything throughout the two weeks of the storm. That seems to be strong evidence of the great stress they were all under. That stress was not only physical caused by the violence of the storm, but it was also mental because of the fears they had. And often great fear is more stressful than the physical kind. And that was no doubt why they had eaten nothing.

I would like to say, however, Paul may have been addressing the passengers about not having eaten, and not the crew. The passengers simply needed to shelter themselves from the storm. While the crew needed to labor to keep the ship afloat. And nourishment is very necessary to sustain labor. And fasting for two straight weeks would have severely limited any man's ability to labor.

Incidentally, I learned from information posted on the internet that the longest lasting modern storm of the western hemisphere was an Atlantic tropical storm, which spun around the open ocean for 28 days in 1971.

They become encouraged and ate

- **And having said these things, and having taken bread, he expressed thanks to God in the presence of all. And having broke in pieces, he began to eat. And they all, having become encouraged, also took food. And all the souls in the ship were two hundred seventy-six. And after being filled of food, they unloaded the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea (Acts 27:35-38).**

Paul was a great spiritual leader, and he inspired confidence in the souls in the ship. Paul first expressed thanks to God in the presence of them all, as Jesus had when he fed the thousands. Unlike Jesus, Paul did not provide the bread for them, but he did serve as an

example by beginning to eat. And that encouraged the others to also partake of food. The public confidence expressed by a respected man can have a strong effect on reducing the mental stress of others. It can calm the fears of people and help them relax and become more composed.

The passage says there were two hundred seventy-six souls in that ship. That means it was very large. One published estimate of its size was one hundred and eighty feet long, and weighed between eighteen hundred to two thousand tons empty. Scoffers consider that an exaggeration, but people often underestimate the abilities of the ancient world. Consider the pyramids of Egypt. Modern men still have not discovered how those ancient Egyptians were able to build such huge structures without modern machines. So far, every time they try it, they fail.

The wheat they cast out was probably part of the cargo, perhaps even the main cargo. However, I think it more probable that the wheat was simply the food stores for the crew and passengers. Otherwise they would have cast it out long before. Remember, they even cast out the tackling of the ship.

Sighting a beach

- **And when it became day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a certain bay having a beach, onto which, they decided if possible, to drive the ship. And having cast off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time unfastening the bands of the rudders (Acts 27:39-40).**

The record says they did not recognize the land. It was a small island south of Sicily. It was probably not recognized because that particular ship had not been there before. Or perhaps it was because of the way they approached the island. Many years ago while I was an aviator in the US Navy I had the opportunity to fly to that Island (Malta). The first thing I noticed when I approached it from the air were the large vertical cliffs along the shore. If those on that ancient ship in the storm saw anything like that it would have terrified them. However, those cliffs do not comprise all the shore of the island. And the text says they saw a bay with a beach.

They decided to drive the ship onto the beach. They had obviously given up all hope of saving the ship; they did not even try to retrieve the anchors. All they could do was to try to save themselves. Evidence of the fierceness of the storm was having to tie the rudder secure. When the sea becomes too rough it becomes impossible to control the rudders of a large ship without power steering. The wheel would break the arms of anybody who tried.

The ship runs aground

- **And having hoisted up the foresail to the wind, they held firm for the shore. And having chanced upon a place where two seas meet, they ran the ship aground. And of course, the bow having become stuck, it remained immovable, but the stern was coming apart by the force of the waves (Acts 27:40-41).**

What is meant by the place where two seas meet is not clear. Nevertheless, whatever it means there was a reef or a sandbank upon which the ship went aground. And it was impossible for them to resist the force of the winds and waves that were behind them. Consequently the ship, not being able to ride along with the waves, the stern of it was absorbing the violence of them. Hence, it was coming apart.

They all jump in the sea to go for land

- **And a decision of the soldiers developed that they should kill the prisoners, lest any man, having swam away, might escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, prevented them from their purpose, and commanded those who were able to swim, having first jumped out, to go to the land, and the remaining, some on boards, and some on any of the things from the ship. And so it came to pass for all to be saved to the land (Acts 27:42-44).**

Remember what happened after the earthquake when Paul and Silas were in prison: **“And suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so as for the foundations of the prison to shake. And immediately all the doors were opened, and the bonds of all the men were unfastened. And the jailor, who became awake and who saw the prison doors opened, having drawn out a sword was going to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have fled”** (Acts 16:26-27).

During Roman times the men who guarded prisoners were in danger of severe punishment if any of them escaped. Hence, those soldiers decided to kill the prisoners lest any of them escape. That centurion prevented them because he wanted to save Paul. He had learned what a wise and righteous man Paul was. And the centurion would have needed to justify to the higher authorities why he had all the prisoners killed except Paul.

They could not have been very far from the shore if some of them swam from the ship. Also it is possible that the waves were breaking on whatever the ship had run aground. That would mean the sea was much calmer on the other side facing the shore. And that would have made it much easier for all of the passengers to get to land.

Regarding this record of Paul and his companions on a ship that was caught in a violent and long lasting storm, the scriptures usually omit details about such things because they are irrelevant to the message being taught. However, this story does describe many details. And I believe the reason is because they also teach important lessons.

For example, often times when I am groaning about some terrible circumstances in my life, I bring to mind this story about Paul and his companions having to endure that vicious storm. Paul was a mighty man of God, and he was much loved by our Lord. Yet Paul was still subjected to that very stressful ordeal. How then can we complain when we are being subjected to stressful ordeals? We can read how he responded to it and follow in his steps, heeding Bible admonitions like this one: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21).

The foreigners treat them kindly

- **And after being saved, then they learned that the island was called Malta. And the foreigners presented uncommon kindness to us, for, having kindled a fire, they received us all because of the present rain, and because of the cold (Acts 28:1-2).**

Luke the author of Acts called the natives of Malta foreigners. They were foreigners to the passengers on the ship. It speaks well of those natives for having presented uncommon kindness to them, to all of the passengers of the ship. That passage mentions the cold wet weather. And not having the shelter of the ship the passengers were no doubt suffering from that weather. Hence, the natives of Malta even kindled a fire for them. Remember, there were two hundred and seventy six souls that had been on board that ship.

Paul suffers no harm from a viper

- **And Paul having gathered a quantity of sticks, and having placed them on the fire, a viper having come out from the heat, it fastened on his hand. And when the foreigners saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to each other, Certainly this man is a murderer, whom, though saved from the sea, Justice did not allow to live.**
- **Indeed therefore having shaken off the creature into the fire, he experienced nothing harmful. But they expected he was going to swell up, or suddenly fall down dead, but when they were long expecting, and seeing nothing amiss happening to him, thinking differently, they declared him to be a god (Acts 28:3-6).**

Paul continued to do what he could to be helpful. Remember what Jesus said about being great among them: **“Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your bondman. Just as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:25-28). One reason Paul was great was because he was a helper whenever there was a need and he was able to help.

Those natives of Malta were Gentiles who practiced polytheism, and Justice was one of their gods. Having seen Paul bitten by that deadly creature the people assumed he was a murderer. That is commonly done in the world, and is one reason why God included the story of Job in the Bible. Read that book and you will learn that it is very wrong to condemn anybody as guilty just because they suffer. The most innocent among us can also suffer in this troubled world.

No harm came to Paul because God protected him. Remember what Jesus said about his disciples near the time of his ascension into heaven: **“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons. They will speak in new tongues. They will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will, no, not**

harm them. They will lay hands on the feeble, and they will fare well” (Mark 16:17-18). Remember also however, those powers were only given during the time when the church was first beginning.

As is usual for the world, those natives quickly went from believing he was a murderer to believing he was a god. And it was all based upon Paul being bitten by the viper but suffering no harm. Wise men do not make hasty judgments from brief circumstances.

It is too easy to be wrong and misled, as those natives were both times. It is wise to confirm judgments, especially about such important things. It also makes you less vulnerable to manipulation. Remember how the citizens of Lystra first declared Barnabas and Paul to be gods (see Acts 14:11), which Barnabas and Paul strenuously opposed. Then when Jews came and persuaded the crowds, the citizens stoned Paul to the point of thinking he was dead. By making hasty judgments those people were not only easily misled, but they were vulnerable to manipulation.

Paul begins healing the infirm

- **Now among the things around that place were fields of the chief of the island, named Publius, who, having received us kindly, lodged us three days. And it came about for the father of Publius to be laid down, gripped by fever and dysentery, to whom Paul, having entered in, and having prayed, having laid his hands on him, healed him.**
- **Therefore when this happened, the others also who had infirmities on the island came and were healed, who also honored us with many honorariums. And while putting out to sea, they furnished the things for our necessities** (Acts 28:7-10).

The chief of the island was also very kind, having received them with lodging. Nothing is said about Publius requiring payment for his services to them. I think it most probably he was simply being generous to those suffering souls. And God rewarded Publius.

As Paul had prayed before taking bread on the ship, so now he prayed when he healed the father of Publius. We should all keep God in mind always when we enjoy his blessings. Praying publicly was also one way that Paul had of testifying for God. There are times for private prayers and times for public ones.

As happened with Jesus, when the people learned what Paul had done, they brought others who had need of healing. Notice also the passage says those natives of Malta honored them with many honorariums, including things for their necessities on their next voyage to Rome. Those Gentiles were righteous souls judged by their works. However, nothing is said about any of them being converted to Christ. Nevertheless, Paul and his companions certainly planted the seeds of the kingdom of God on that island. And history tells us that future generations there did become Christians.

Departing for Rome

- **And after three months we set out in a ship that wintered at the island, an Alexandrian with The Twin Brothers emblem. And after being brought down to Syracuse, we remained there three days, from where having made a circuit, we arrived at Rhegium. And after one day, wind from the south having developed, we came a second day to Puteoli, where, having found brothers, we were invited to stay with them seven days (Acts 28:11-14).**

That ship was also from Alexandria. It probably took a more direct route to Rome. And since Malta was on the way they wintered there. Regarding the ship's emblem, I found this description of Twin Brothers on the website Encyclopedia.com: "In Greek mythology, Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus. They were regarded as protectors of seamen, and ships often had their figures on the bows, as did Paul's on the journey from Malta to Italy (Acts 28:11)."

Syracuse was a seaport on the east coast of Sicily, the large island directly south of Italy. Sicily is so near Italy that a bridge has been proposed. Whether it will be built is controversial. A massive suspension bridge would be required, needing to be about two miles long. That would make it very expensive. There are also worries about the frequent earthquakes in the area. A tunnel from Sicily to Italy has also been proposed. Time will tell if any such link is ever created. It was a long time before the great tunnel from Britain to France was finally built. However, it supports a huge amount of traffic, and earthquakes there are rare.

Rhegium was a seaport at the southern tip of Italy. Puteoli was on the west coast of Italy, about two thirds the way up to Rome, and a little more than a hundred miles south of it. Paul and his companions found Christian brothers there at Puteoli. By remaining seven days, that would have given Paul more time to help strengthen their faith and increase their knowledge of the good news of Christ, which he no doubt did. How the centurion who was guarding Paul was involved in those seven days is not told.

Meeting the brothers from Rome

- **And so we went toward Rome. And from there the brothers, who heard these things about us, came for a meeting with us as far as Appius Forum and The Three Taverns, whom, when Paul saw, having expressed thanks to God, he took courage (Acts 28:14-15).**

The Three Taverns was a town thirty-three miles south of Rome. Appius Forum was a town about fifteen miles south of that. The wording suggests some of the brothers from Rome waited for him at The Three Taverns and some went farther on to Appius Forum. Perhaps most of the women and elder men waited at The Three Taverns. Remember, traveling on land was much more strenuous in those days.

Nothing is said about how many came to meet Paul and his companions. However, it speaks very well of how much they loved him and cherished his presence. He had already written at least one letter to them, the one recorded in the New Testament. Here is what he

said in that letter about meeting with them: **“To all who are in Rome beloved of God, to the called, to the sanctified: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

“First, I indeed express thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your faith is proclaimed in the whole world. For God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit in the good news of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers, pleading, if somehow now at last I will have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, in order to establish you, and that is, to be mutually encouraged among you through each other’s faith, both yours and mine.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that I often intended to come to you (and was prevented until now), so that I might have some fruit also among you, even as among the other Gentiles. I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So the willingness is in me to preach the good news also to you in Rome” (Romans 1:7-15).

The fact that they traveled about a day’s journey to meet him on the way clearly indicates how desirous they were for his visit. And that was no doubt recognized by Paul and his companions. Hence, he expressed thanks to God and took courage. Remember, he was still in bonds, waiting for a final decision about the false accusations brought against him by the Jews.

Paul was allowed to dwell by himself

- **And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the commandant, but Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him (Acts 28:16).**

That centurion obviously had great authority. Remember, he was the man who made the final decision about whether to sail from Fair Havens or not. And now he was able to keep Paul separate from the other prisoners that he delivered to the commandant. Paul had proven the quality of his spirit many times on that journey to Rome. And the centurion had obviously developed great respect for him. And that respect included trusting Paul to live by himself, guarded by a single soldier.

Paul explains to the Jews

- **And it came to pass after three days, for Paul to call together those who were the principle men of the Jews. And when they came together, he said to them, Men, brothers, I, having done nothing against the people, or the paternal customs, I was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, after examining me, wanted to release me, because there was not one cause of death in me.**
- **But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal Caesar, not as having anything to accuse my nation. Because of this reason therefore I**

summoned you to see and to speak with me, for because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain (Acts 28:16-20).

By now Paul had already spent time with the disciples at Rome. Now he wanted to meet with the principle men of the Jews to explain why he was there in bonds. He wanted them to know that he was not the one making accusations to the Romans. The real reason he was in bonds was because of the promise God had made to his people, the promised Messiah, which was the very hope of their nation. His explanation was factual and simple. And those Jews could have confirmed everything he said.

Notice in Paul's words how he referred to being bound with a chain. Remember what Paul said to Agrippa after Agrippa said Paul was persuading him to become a Christian: **"I ever pray to God, both by little and by much, not only thee, but also all who hear me this day, to become such kind as I also am, apart from these bonds"** (Acts 26:29). He spoke of being in bonds, but in his words to the Jews at Rome he spoke more specifically of being bound with a chain.

Even though the centurion had allowed Paul to dwell by himself, he was still guarded by a soldier and was kept bound with a chain. The centurion probably had no authority to remove those.

They had not been informed

- **And they said to him, We neither received letters from Judea about thee, nor did any of the brothers who came report or speak anything bad about thee** (Acts 28:21).

In spite of the amount of time that had past, the Jews at Rome had heard nothing about Paul. Why the leaders of the Jews at Jerusalem had not informed them is not told. Perhaps they were weary of opposing Paul, and were just glad he was now far away from them. Our enemies can become weary of opposing us just as we can become weary of their opposition. And the more we resist their opposition the more weary they can become.

Our perseverance is a strength for us. Therefore, keep in mind these words: **"For consider the man [Jesus Christ] who endured such hostility against him by sinners, so that ye may not be weary in your souls, being disheartened"** (Hebrews 12:3).

Wanting to know more

- **But we think it worthy to hear from thee what thou think. For indeed about this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against** (Acts 28:22).

Although they had heard nothing bad about Paul, everything they had heard about the church was bad; it was everywhere spoken against. It speaks well of those Jews in Rome that they wanted to know more about the church.

Regarding the word sect, it should be recognized that applying that label to a group was not always meant to be negative about it. For both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were called sects (see for examples, Acts 5:17 and 15:5). And in modern America both the democratic and the Republican parties could be called political sects. Therefore, those Jews in

Rome were not necessarily condemning the church when they called it a sect. Indeed, they appeared to be open minded about it.

Paul testifies to them all day long

- **And having appointed a day for him, more came to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded, solemnly testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them of the things about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening. And some were convinced by the things that were spoken, and some disbelieved (Acts 28:23-24).**

The fact those principle men of the Jews were willing to listen to Paul **“from morning until evening”** indicates at least two things. First, they respected Paul enough to hear him, and second, they were interested in learning more about the church. Notice how the text says that Paul was persuading them of the things about Jesus, **“both from the law of Moses and the prophets.”** In other words, he was using the Old Testament scriptures to verify and support what he was saying.

As usual just about everywhere in the world, some were convinced by what he said, and some disbelieved. It is rare when the principle leaders of a region at some place are all convinced. It is more common for all of them to disbelieve. For those who are worthy of salvation have always been a small minority in the world.

Paul quotes a warning from God

- **And being discord among each other, they departed after Paul spoke one thing, saying, Well spoke the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, Go thou to this people, and say, Hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive.**
- **For this people’s heart was made fat, and they hear heavily with the ears. And they shut their eyes, lest they may perceive with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with the heart, and should turn, and I would heal them (Acts 28:25-27).**

Isaiah had a vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne. He also saw seraphim with him. It was then that the Holy Spirit spoke those words to Isaiah for the people of Israel. Here is what the passage says: **“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Lo, send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed”** (Isaiah 6:8-10).

Jesus also quoted that passage to his disciples when he was explaining why he only spoke to the multitudes in parables (see Matthew 13:13, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, and John 9:39). See Matthew 13:10-17 for my comments about that passage from Isaiah.

The Gentiles will hear

- **Be it known to you therefore, that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear** (Acts 28:28).

Remember, the salvation of God was first sent to Gentiles with Cornelius the centurion (see Acts 10). And remember also what Jesus said to Paul when he wanted to remain in Jerusalem: **“Depart, because I will send thee far away to Gentiles”** (Acts 22:21).

And in his letter to the Romans, Paul had told how the Gentiles would become God’s people, and he quoted a prophecy about that. Here is what Paul said: **“As also he says in Hosea, I will call those not my people, my people, and her who was not beloved, beloved. And it will be in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not my people, there they will be called, sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, If the number of the sons of Israel may be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved”** (Romans 9:25-27).

Moreover, Paul had learned from years of experience that Gentiles would listen to the good news of Christ, even when the Jews rejected it.

Paul teaches all who come to him

- **And when he said these things, the Jews departed, having much disputing among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired lodging. And he received all who came in to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, without hindrance** (Acts 28:29-31).

What happened to Paul after those two years is not known. Hence, there are many conjectures. Some claim he was beheaded by Nero. Others claim he was released and traveled about for a while. It is all unimportant conjecture. If God wanted us to know he would have included that information in this book. What he has provided is sufficient for us.

A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to the Romans

An apostle of Christ

- **Paul, a bondman of Jesus Christ, a called apostle having been separated for the good news of God (which he fore-promised through his prophets in the holy scriptures) concerning his Son who was made from the seed of David according to flesh (Romans 1:1-3).**

As part of his introduction Paul said several things about himself. He said (1) he was a bondman of Jesus Christ, (2) he was a called apostle, and (3) he had been separated for the good news of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ.

After his great vision of Jesus, Paul devoted the rest of his life serving him. He served him not only as a bondman, but also as an apostle. And he was a called apostle because it was Jesus who called him to be one of his apostles, his apostle to the Gentiles. We find in several of Paul's letters his defense of being an apostle of Christ. That was necessary for him because other men sometimes challenged his claim. Remember, Paul never walked with Jesus as the other apostles had. He may have never even seen him while he was here.

After Jesus called him, Paul was separated from his past life in order to promote the good news of God. That good news of God is about God's Son Jesus Christ. Christ came into this world to give us salvation. And God fore-promised that salvation through his prophets in the holy scriptures. For there are many places in the Old Testament that prophesy about the coming Christ.

The following passage describes how Jesus read one of those prophecies in a synagogue where he was reared as a child: **“And he came to Nazareth, where he was brought up. And according to that which was customary to him, he entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.**

“And having opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to send forth in deliverance those who have been broken, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

“And having closed the book, having given it back to the attendant, he sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were focused on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus was made from the seed of David, because God promised David that he would give him an everlasting kingdom. Jehovah said to him, **“And it shall come to pass, when thy days are fulfilled that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will set up thy seed after thee, who shall be of thy sons. And I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for me a house, and I will establish his throne forever” (First Chronicles 17:11-12).** Jesus was a son of David (of a later generation) according to flesh. God fulfills his every

promise. And he will fulfill his promise to us of eternal life in heaven with him if we remain faithful to the end.

Son of God in power

- **He who was designated Son of God in power, according to a spirit of holiness, from a resurrection of the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord—through whom we received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the nations on behalf of his name, among which ye also are the called of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:4-6).**

Jesus has always been the only begotten Son of God, but he was designated Son of God in power because of his perfect life of obedience to the Father. He was designated that way according to a spirit of holiness. Holiness means purity, and Jesus lived a life of complete holiness. That proved his complete moral and spiritual superiority, and earned him the right to give us salvation. He was given that power after his resurrection, because his death upon the cross was the climax of his perfect life in this world filled with trials and temptations. I speak much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

It was through Christ that mankind has received the grace of God for our salvation. Apostleship means being appointed to go on a mission. And it was through Christ that Paul and the other men received their apostleship, their commission to evangelize for the obedience of our faith. Which faith is in the name of Jesus Christ. And that obedience of faith is to be among all the nations.

Paul also said those disciples in Rome were the called of Jesus Christ. We are all called to be disciples of Christ, because as long as we have our own free will God cannot make us have faith in him. He sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to invite us, to call us to the grace of his salvation. And Jesus sent out his apostles to call us to have faith in him. Those men served their apostleship by evangelizing while they were upon the earth. And they continue to evangelize through the words of the New Testament that they left for all men, for all the nations.

To the called and sanctified in Rome

- **To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, to the called, to the sanctified: (Romans 1:7).**

Paul wrote this book for the disciples in Rome. Being disciples of Christ they were therefore beloved of God. They had been called by him to be part of his kingdom. And when they accepted his call he sanctified them. To sanctify means to make pure and holy. And it was through the redeeming power of Christ that he sanctified them. For when Jesus completed his perfect life upon this earth he earned the right from God to redeem from the condemnation our sins all who belong to him. It was part of God's payment to him for his perfect obedience.

Hence, we have been bought with a price. As Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from**

God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is of God” (First Corinthians 6:19-20).

Our sins condemned us, but when we answer God’s call then Jesus redeems us from that condemnation. For Paul also said about him, **“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, according to the wealth of his grace, which he abounded for us in all wisdom and intelligence”** (Ephesians 1:7-8). The shedding of Jesus’ blood was the climax of his perfect life of obedience to God in the world, because of which God gave him the right to redeem us.

Grace and peace from God and Christ

- **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** (Romans 1:7).

Thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written by Paul. (Many believe the book of Hebrews was also written by him.) Ten of his books include this greeting: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** One of them says *the* Father and *our* Lord instead of *our* Father and *the* Lord: **“Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Galatians 1:3).

The three remaining books were written to Paul’s close companions—two for Timothy and one for Titus. The greetings in them are very similar: **“Grace, mercy, peace, from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord”** (First Timothy 1:2), **“Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Second Timothy 1:2), and **“Grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ our Savior”** (Titus 1:4).

In all of his books Paul was both calling for grace and peace to them, and also telling them they had grace and peace. And that grace and peace was from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ—our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Both of them are ours because we belong to them. Sinners reject both God and Christ. Hence God is not their Father, nor is Jesus their Lord. They are rebel spirits who reject God and Christ, and are rejected by them. Therefore, they receive no blessing of grace and peace as children of God.

In Paul’s two books to Timothy and the one to Titus he also said they had mercy from God and Christ as well as grace and peace. He may have added that because they were men who were at the forefront in the struggle to promote the good news of Christ. They were often subject to greater persecutions from the enemies of God. They needed more of God’s mercy to protect them from the severity of the opposition they faced. Try actively promoting the authentic good news of Christ and opposing the many errors of the world, and you will see how severe the persecutions can become.

Paul is thankful for them

- **First, I indeed express thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your faith is proclaimed in the whole world. For God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit in the good news of his Son, how unceasingly I**

make mention of you always in my prayers, pleading, if somehow now at last I will have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come to you (Romans 1:8-10).

Paul was very grateful for their faith, which was known everywhere. Remember, words and expressions in the Bible like “the whole world” do not have the same absolute meaning they have to us. Paul meant the whole world as they knew it. Rome was the capital of the mighty Roman empire. And it is understandable that knowledge of whatever happened there would spread widely. It is common nowadays to forget that news can spread by word of mouth widely. And the news of the strength of the disciples in Rome had spread everywhere, for which Paul expressed thanks to God.

Notice how Paul expressed thanks to God through Jesus Christ. For it is through Jesus that we have access to God the Father. As Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6). Notice also how Paul expressed thanks for all of them. They were obviously a very strong congregation in the Spirit. And they had none of the spiritual problems that Paul wrote about to some of the other congregations.

Paul said he served God in his spirit in the good news of his Son. Paul’s service to God was not something he did as a mere obligation. He served him in his spirit, which means he served him with his innermost being. He put his heart and soul in his service to God in the good news of Jesus Christ. As Paul said, when he called himself the least of the apostles, **“... but I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me”** (First Corinthians 15:10).

He told those brothers in Rome how unceasingly he made mention of them always in his prayers. That let them know how much he loved them and never forgot them. He also pleaded for the will of God that he would come to them, and have a prosperous journey on the way. And the book of Acts shows how God answered his prayer. For he did come to them. And the journey was very prosperous in a spiritual sense. It was a rough and dangerous trip in the physical sense, but on that journey much good was done to promote glory and honor to the cause of Christ (see Acts 27-28).

Longing to be mutually encouraged

- **For I long to see you, so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, in order to establish you, and that is, to be mutually encouraged among you through each other’s faith, both yours and mine** (Romans 1:11-12).

Paul had the power to impart gifts of the Holy Spirit, which gifts enabled them to perform special signs and wonders. Those powers have passed away and are no longer given because they ceased soon after the New Testament was being written. They ceased because they are no longer needed. The words of the New Testament are now sufficient for us.

Nevertheless, we too can impart spiritual gifts to each other. We can do it through each other’s faith, because that will never pass away. The stronger our faith the more it will encourage the faith of others. We can also use our knowledge of the word of God to help

others learn more about his will for us. And that will mutually encourage our obedience. Moreover, we can share our love for each other to encourage our spirits. For love always encourages. Indeed, nothing has the power to encourage more than love.

In all of those ways we can be mutually encouraged, which will help establish us stronger in the kingdom of God.

His intentions to come

- **But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that I often intended to come to you (and was prevented until now), so that I might have some fruit also among you, even as among the other Gentiles. I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So the willingness is in me to preach the good news also to you in Rome (Romans 1:13-15).**

Paul wanted them to know that he tried to come to them, but was prevented. He did not say specifically how he was prevented, probably because it involved many things. His point was that he had been trying to come to them. He wanted to come to them so that he could have some fruit among them as well as the other Gentiles. Paul had produced much fruit among the Gentiles of various lands, but he had not yet had a chance in Rome. The fruit that Paul produced primarily was saved souls for the kingdom of God. And he was desirous of preaching the good news of Christ to them in Rome, because that would bring fruit for him there also.

Paul apparently used his reference in that passage to Greeks and to Barbarians to symbolize extremes. The Greeks probably symbolized the most civilized of peoples, while the Barbarians symbolized the least civilized. He also used the extremes of intellect or mental development when he mentioned the wise and the foolish. Hence, Paul was a debtor to every kind of Gentile. For he was chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles, as he said farther in this book: **“For I speak to you the Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am indeed an apostle of Gentiles ...”** (Romans 11:13).

The power of God for salvation

- **For I am not ashamed of the good news of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to every man who believes, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek (Romans 1:16).**

The authentic good news of Christ has always been hated in the world. Jesus warned his disciples about that many times. Therefore, many souls who believe in him are ashamed of it. They are ashamed of it because the world mocks and ridicules it—the *authentic* good news. They tolerate, and sometimes even praise, the inferior imitations of it. But the genuine good news of Christ is mocked and ridiculed. And they try to shame all believers. That was certainly true during the time of Paul. But he was not ashamed of it.

Paul was not ashamed of it, even though it was mocked and ridiculed, because he knew of its power. It is the power of God. And it is God’s power for our salvation, that is for all of us who believe. And that includes both the Jews and the Gentiles (commonly called

Greeks). The Jews received that power of salvation first because they had been God's chosen people, and he had promised it to them. However, God is the God of all people, and we Gentiles are also included in the salvation of the good news of Christ.

Faith reveals the righteousness of God

- **For the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith for faith, just as it is written, And the righteous man will live from faith** (Romans 1:17).

God's righteousness is revealed in the good news of Christ. It reveals both how God is righteous, and how he makes us righteous. Paul said that God's righteousness was revealed in the good news of Christ **"from faith for faith."** It is only by our faith in God that his righteousness can be revealed to us.

Unrepentant sinners may have some knowledge of the words of the good news, but they cannot understand it correctly, nor can it enter into their hearts. It is concealed to them because Paul said, **"But even if our good news is concealed, it is concealed in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, in order for the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ (who is a likeness of God) not to shine forth to them"** (Second Corinthians 4:3-4).

God only reveals his righteousness to those who are humble and lowly, and are eager to learn the truth of him. Remember what Jesus once said about that: **"I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight"** (Matthew 11:25-26).

Therefore, only by believing Jesus Christ, repenting of our sins, and accepting his good news of our salvation, will the righteousness of God be revealed to us. And by our knowledge of it our faith is strengthened. Hence, the righteousness of God is revealed to us in the good news of Christ (1) *from* our faith in him, and (2) *for* our faith in him. The more we believe in him, the more he reveals his righteousness to us, and that makes us believe in him even more. Consequently, our faith is like a cyclical process that leads ever upward to the higher and nobler things of life, and away from the base and filthy things of this sinful world.

Remember however, God reveals his righteousness to us, not in some mysterious way, but in our knowledge of the good news of Christ, which has been recorded for us in the Bible. Our faith leads us to study those words, and by learning them our faith grows stronger.

That is why the righteous man will live by faith. For without faith we cannot know his righteousness. And knowing the fullness of God's righteousness opens our eyes to see its wonders, its glory, and its vast superiority, which unrepentant sinners can never see.

The passage Paul quoted was from the prophet Habakkuk in the Old Testament: **"But the righteous man shall live by his faith"** (Habakkuk 2:4). That was a lesson the Jews never learned. They thought a man would be righteous by obeying the law, regardless of how much faith he had. Paul explains those things in more detail farther in this book.

No excuse to deny God

- **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what is knowable of God is apparent in them, for God made it known to them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things made, both his eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).**

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven in many ways against men who show contempt for him and live sinfully. In the law of Moses, Jehovah gave a long list of blessings to his people Israel if they remained faithful to him (see Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, he also gave a much longer list of curses that he would bring against them if they turned away from him (see Leviticus 26:14-43 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The book of Revelation also mentions the wrath of God against the people of the world for their sinfulness. It describes plagues that he brings upon them, often using very figurative words. Here is one passage that gives the reason why God reveals his wrath that way: **“And the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they would not worship the demons, and the golden and silver and brass and stone and wooden idols, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts”** (Revelation 9:20-21).

Not only do men live unrighteously, but they suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. They actively oppose the truth of God as it is revealed both in the holy scriptures and in nature itself. For they can clearly see the invisible things of him from the creation of the world. God is invisible, but his eternal power and divinity can be seen by the things he made. Indeed, our very existence is clear evidence that we were created. And only an eternal power and divinity—the almighty and all wise God of the Bible—could have done it. Therefore, they have no excuse, and are therefore worthy of suffering his wrath against them.

Professing to be wise, they became foolish

- **Because, although knowing God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were they thankful, but became vain in their reasonings and their heart was darkened without understanding. Professing to be wise, they became foolish, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed things, and creeping things (Romans 1:21-23).**

Men know God by knowing that the world exists and it is filled with wonders of life and the lawfulness of nature. For such things are impossible without him. Yet they refuse to glorify him as God. They suppress the fact of his existence by promoting the foolish idea that all things just happen to exist for no reason. They say the world just made living things and the lawfulness of nature by itself; it just happened, it just “evolved.” Which is

truly a great delusion blinding their hearts. That shows how they **“became vain in their reasonings and their heart was darkened without understanding.”**

According to their reasonings we have no hope beyond our brief and troubled lives here upon the earth. According to them we are only animals with lives that are ultimately meaningless, purposeless, and vain. And with that kind of reasoning their hearts are hardened without understanding. In their mental darkness they cannot see beyond the death of each of us. For them that is the absolute end. In their darkness they cannot understand the good news of Christ and the hope it gives us of an everlasting life in the greater world of heaven.

Moreover, professing to wise, they became foolish. Our universities are filled with men who profess to be wise, but they deny their Creator God. Believing instead in some mythical force they call evolution, which they claim created all living things. They have taken earthly life and made for themselves an imitation (or an intellectual image) of the creative power of God. For example, they claim that the lower beasts like apes and monkeys created mankind (by their evolution), consequently glorifying the beasts of the earth as being our creator. To call them foolish is a great understatement.

Degrading themselves to filthiness

- **And for this reason God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, to degrade their bodies among themselves, who changed the truth of God into the lie, and worshiped and served the creation against him who created it, who is blessed into the ages. Truly (Romans 1:24-26).**

All of the things described in this part of the book of Romans seem to be a prophecy of what is happening in my generation. Most people no longer glorify God or are thankful to him. Their reasoning has become vain, and their hearts are darkened without understanding. They profess to be wise but have become foolish. They claim we were created by the beasts of the earth, which themselves were created by the dirt of the ground. Or was it the primordial slime? What madness!

Consequently, our people have begun to indulge the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness. They defile themselves with all kinds of sins. They degrade their bodies among themselves by appearing like clowns with wild hair and clothing, adding vulgar tattoos to their bodies, puncturing their faces and other tender parts of their bodies with pieces of metal, polluting their minds with all kinds of drugs.

They changed what was once taught about God from his holy Bible, into a lie about who we are and why we exist. They also worship other mythical creatures called “mother nature” and “mother earth.” They have even created a special day of veneration for the creation called “earth day.” During which time they praise the creation but ignore God who created all things. They also condemn mankind for multiplying and having power over the earth in obedience to his will (see Genesis 1:28). They are truly blind disciples of the devil.

Their unnatural lusts

- **Because of this God gave them up to shameful passions, for even their females changed the natural use into what is against nature. And likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female, burned in their lust toward each other, males with males producing shamelessness, and receiving in themselves the recompense of their deviancy that was fitting (Romans 1:26-27).**

That is a clear description of the sin of homosexuality, both among men and among women. And that too has increased greatly in pagan America. Homosexuality has gone from being considered a sin and a crime, then to being considered a mental disorder, to now being considered a right to be defended by our rulers. Indeed, those who oppose it are now said to have a mental disorder, which they call “homophobia.” Moreover, they are beginning to be given a right for them to marry each other in homosexual marriages.

That perversion is truly shameful. Yet they now even have what they call “gay rights” parades, where they flaunt their perversity. They have even had such parades in the once holy city of Jerusalem. They and their supporters call them gay. But that too is a perversion of the word, because there is nothing gay about them. Their use of that word has become so widely acceptable that it has lost its original meaning.

They have learned nothing from the example of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19). Whether God will rain down fire and brimstone upon the worst of the cities, I know not. I do know that fiery destruction is now possible for any city because of the power of nuclear bombs. Nevertheless, the above passage clearly tells how they will receive a fitting recompense of their deviancy. And God has many ways to recompense them, including diseases.

Many excuse homosexuality by saying it is harmless. Nevertheless, God considers it deadly. For both adultery and homosexuality were capital crimes in the law of Moses. Therefore, it should never be tolerated, even if it seems harmless to us. The harmful consequences of many sins happen later, sometimes years later.

I am reminded of what happened to a large slab of concrete I hired a man to lay for me. Instead of coming himself he sent his inferior assistant. I could not watch the man do the work because I needed to go teach my classes at the university. The slab seemed OK for several years. The consequences of his inferior work were not seen for many years afterward. Over the years the surface gradually began to come apart and flake off. That happened because the man added too much water to the concrete. The added water made it much easier for him to work the concrete, but it destroyed the quality of it. And so it is for many sins. Harmful consequences may not be seen for a long time, but they are inevitable for every sin.

Dear reader, you must study the entire Bible to learn how things that seem harmless to us can be deadly. For example, the law of Moses contains many ordinances about washings and other matters of cleanliness, especially around dead flesh. Yet God never gave an explanation why. Centuries later mankind discovered a major reason why: the existence of harmful and deadly micro-organisms.

Therefore, be wise and accept all of God's commands even when you do not understand the reason why. A modern example of commands that men are rejecting because they see no reason for them is all of the sex perversions that are so rampant now; things such as homosexuality, pedophilia, bestiality, and transvestism. The most widespread example of transvestism is when women dress like men. They are seen everywhere. Yet God commanded, **"A woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for whoever does these things is an abomination to Jehovah thy God"** (Deuteronomy 22:5). And it is just as perverse for women to act like men.

Rejecting God and given unfit minds

- **And just as they did not approve having God in knowledge, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do things that are not fit; having been filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; being gossips, slanderous, God-hating, aggressors, arrogant boasters, contrivers of evil things, disobedient to parents; without understanding, untrustworthy, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. Who, knowing the righteousness of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also favor those who do** (Romans 1:28-32).

Not approving having God in knowledge is another characteristic of pagan America. They have perverted our laws to exclude any mention of God in any part of our public places, including our public schools. Our Universities have also excluded him, making any reference to him seem shameful. The only exception to making him unmentionable is their common use of his name in vain, as an expletive. All of those things have developed in my lifetime after the country decided to abandon God and become pagan. Here is a list of the evils that Paul mentioned in that passage, saying they were

guilty of

all unrighteousness

fornication

wickedness

greed

evil

full of

envy

murder

strife

deceit

malignity

being

gossips

slanderous

God-hating

aggressors
arrogant boasters
contrivers of evil things
disobedient to parents
without understanding
untrustworthy
without natural affection
implacable
unmerciful

They know those things are wrong and deserve severe punishment, including death. Yet they not only do them, but they favor those who do. I have seen many examples of that, especially in the entertainment business. They glorify the worst of sinners, while mocking and ridiculing all who attempt to promote righteousness. They commonly show criminals as being clever and kind to the poor, but they portray policemen as either fools and bunglers or as cruel and unjust.

All men are without excuse

- **Therefore, O man, thou are without excuse, every man who judges, for in what thou judge the other man, thou condemn thyself, for the man who judges is doing the same things. And we know that the judgment of God is in accordance with truth against those who commit such things.**
- **And think thou this, O man who judge those who do such things and do the same, that thou will escape the judgment of God? (Romans 2:1-3).**

Paul is not accusing every man of doing all those evils. He is simply saying that no man is completely innocent. Hence, none of us will escape the judgment of God. Even those who judge and condemn sinners are subject to God's judgment because no man lives a sinless life, no man except Jesus Christ the Son of God. And a single sin will condemn us, just as it did for Adam. Paul later explains how our hope of escaping the judgment of God is only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Leading to repentance

- **Or do thou despise the wealth of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance? (Romans 2:4).**

The wealth of God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering is beyond measure. And the suffering we experience is like a drop in the ocean compared with his. God cannot sin, but he suffers the consequences of sin just as we do. Paul spoke of the grief of God, when he said, "**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye are sealed for a day of redemption**" (Ephesians 4:30).

We are all God's offspring, and what righteous father or mother does not grieve when their children do wrong? Righteous fathers and mothers do not enjoy punishing their chil-

dren. Neither does God enjoy punishing us. Consider this passage: **“As I live, says the lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but that the wicked man turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”** (Ezekiel 33:11).

Hence, the wealth of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering is intended to lead us to repentance. And without them there would be no hope for us. For justice demands that guilt be punished. And the punishment for sin is death. The long-term consequences of Adam’s sin are astronomical. And the long-term consequences of every sin are astronomical, even though we cannot see them just as Adam could not foresee the enormous consequences of his sin. Hence, even a single sin demands the death penalty.

Therefore, if it were not for the wealth of God’s goodness and forbearance and longsuffering there would be no hope for us. And our salvation can only come from repenting and putting our faith in Jesus Christ.

Wrath for the impenitent

- **But according to thy hardness, and thy impenitent heart, thou store up wrath to thyself in the day of wrath, and revealing, and righteous judgment of God, who will render to each man according to his works.**
- **To those who indeed seek by perseverance of good work, glory and honor and immortality—eternal life—but to those of self-interest, and who indeed disobey the truth but have confidence in unrighteousness—anger and wrath, pressure and restriction, upon every soul of man who produces evil, both of the Jew first, and of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who works good, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek** (Romans 2:5-10).

Men will not be condemned to hell primarily because of their sins, because through Christ sins can be forgiven. Men will be condemned because of their hardness, and their impenitent hearts, which will never be forgiven. Hardness and impenitence stores up the wrath of God which will be manifested in the day of wrath and revealing and righteous judgment of God. That day is the great day of the final judgment.

That day is a day of wrath against all who are hardened against God and his righteousness, and refused to repent. It is a day of revealing when all men will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. As Paul said later in this book, **“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God. So then each of us will give account about himself to God”** (Romans 14:10-12).

It is a day of righteous judgment of God because justice will be done. Speaking of him the psalmist said, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). Therefore, he will render to each man according to his works. Those of us who belong to Christ have been justly redeemed from the condemnation of our sins, and we will be rewarded in that day. But all unrepentant sinners will be justly condemned because

of their sins, and they will receive the punishment of hell. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul said that those who will be rewarded with eternal life are the ones (1) who persevere in good works, and (2) who seek glory and honor and immortality. And again he said the glory and honor and peace were to every man who works good. Notice how Paul emphasized the necessity of good works. He also emphasized how we will receive glory and honor in the afterlife. Here in this world the genuine disciples of Christ are scorned and belittled. Our glory and honor will be in heaven.

Paul also said that those who will be punished (1) are of self-interest, (2) they disobey the truth, and (3) they have confidence in unrighteousness. Being of self-interest means being selfish. And being selfish means thinking only of satisfying and promoting self, regardless of the needs, desires, and worthiness of others. It is by definition unjust.

Those who will be punished also disobey the truth. The word truth in the Bible often refers to the ways of righteousness. Sinners love deceit and they love to sin. They love deceit because it give them advantages they do not deserve; it too is unjust. They hate truth because it exposes and condemns their sins. If you want to see their anger, then expose and condemn their sins with the truth of God's word. Common examples of sins they love are fornication and drunkenness. Try rebuking them for those things and they will curse you.

Sinners will be punished with anger and wrath, pressure and restriction. God will be angry and wrathful toward them because they produce evil. And evil always eventually results in misery and sorrow, destruction and death. And because they produce evil they will receive evil, the evil of hell where they will suffer pressure and restriction. There will be no rest or freedom there.

Notice how Paul also said the rewards and the punishments would be for both Jews and Gentiles who either work good or produce evil. The only difference between them is that the Jews would be first. They would be first because they were the first to receive the good news of Jesus Christ. Remember, the sons of Israel had been God's chosen people among all the peoples of the world. But now the disciples of Christ are his chosen people.

No partiality with God

- **For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also be destroyed without law, and as many as have sinned in law will be judged by law. For the hearers of the law are not righteous with God, but the doers of the law will be made righteous (Romans 2:11-13).**

The Bible uses the word law in several ways. In the above passage the law refers to intellectual knowledge of good and evil. And Paul is saying that whether men have an intellectual knowledge of it or not they will still be judged by how they live by it. For knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong, also includes our innate or instinctive awareness of it. For we all have that basic instinctive knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong.

Hence, we will all be judged by it, whether we have an intellectual knowledge of it or not. For every man knows in his heart what is basically good and evil, right and wrong. And

the man who lives by what is good and right will be made righteous in the sight of God. Paul says more about those things in the next passage.

Doing the law by nature

- **For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news (Romans 2:14-16).**

Doing the law by nature means doing things that are good and right instinctively. For the basic knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong, is written in our hearts by our inborn conscience. That inborn conscience matures very early in our childhood. Although it can be destroyed later, as Paul said to Timothy: **“But the Spirit says expressly that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, their own conscience having been seared with a hot iron ...”** (First Timothy 4:1-2).

Therefore, even for those without an intellectual knowledge of good and evil, they will still be judged by their works. For their own thoughts will either accuse them or will defend them in the great day of judgment. Even though their conscience can be destroyed, their instinctive knowledge of right and wrong never leave them. They just become insensitive to the evils they commit, having no conscience left to accuse them. But that instinctive knowledge will accuse them when God judges the world.

God will judge the world, including every secret thing done by men. For there is nothing hidden from God. He even knows our every thought. For Jesus said, **“... I am he who searches the inner feelings and hearts. And I will give to you—to each—according to your works”** (Revelation 2:23). Paul said that God will judge us **“according to my good news.”** Paul was referring to the good news of Christ. It was his good news because it is every Christian’s good news. If you are a faithful disciple then it is also your good news. It is good news because it tells us how to be saved and receive God’s grace of eternal life.

Teacher, teach thyself

- **Behold, thou art called a Jew, and rely upon the law, and boast in God, and know his will, and approve the things that are significant, being instructed out of the law. And thou hast confidence in thyself to be a guide of the blind, a light of those in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the childlike, having in the law the essence of knowledge and truth, thou therefore who teach another, dost thou not teach thyself?**
- **Thou who preach not to steal, dost thou steal? Thou who say not to commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou who abhor idols, dost thou rob temples? (Romans 2:17-22).**

The sons of Israel had been chosen to be God's people. The Jews were the remnant of the Israelites who survived the conquests and dispersions caused by their sins. During the time of Christ the Jews had become a very proud people, considering themselves superior to Gentiles because they belonged to God and had his law. Indeed, they had much contempt for Gentiles, considering them to be wretched sinners.

Paul first shows why they considered themselves a superior people. They (1) called themselves Jews, (2) relied upon the law, (3) boasted in God, (4) knew his will, and (5) approved the things that are significant, having been instructed out of the law.

By calling themselves Jews they identified themselves as God's chosen people. They relied upon the law, because God said obedience to it would bless them (see Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14). They boasted in God because he is the Creator of the world, the true and living God who is the Almighty. Unlike ignorant Gentiles they knew the will of God. And they approved the things that are significant—that which is good and right and just—because they had been instructed out of the law. They had everything important to be the most civilized peoples of the world.

Hence, they were confident to be (1) a guide to the blind, (2) a light of those in darkness, (3) a corrector of the foolish, and (4) a teacher of the childlike, because they had in the law the essence of knowledge and truth.

By knowing God's will they were qualified to guide the blind, meaning those who are blinded to God's righteousness by the devil. For our innate knowledge of good and evil is very primitive, and we can be led astray from it. Those Jews could act as a light to those in spiritual darkness, revealing the truth to them about God and his law. They could also correct those who were living foolishly in their ignorance, and also teach the childlike in their ignorance.

They could do all of those things because they had in the law the essence of knowledge and truth. The law of God indeed contains the essence of knowledge and truth. Knowing the law of God provides the only sure foundation for all other knowledge. I spent many years studying the law of God from the Bible, and I still marvel about how much wisdom it contains. The law of God for the Jews was the law of Moses. It teaches so many things about how we should live justly and righteously. However, the good news of Christ now gives us a new law of God, called the law of liberty.

The law of Moses was a legal system, which is required for a nation containing both righteous and unrighteous souls. Christ's law of liberty is for the righteous only—those in the kingdom of God—and it is much superior to any legal system. When Paul was contrasting the two, he said, **“For if the administration of condemnation has glory, the administration of righteousness excels much more in glory. For also that which has been glorified, has not been glorified in this regard, because of the glory that transcends. For if that which is abolished was through glory, much more that which remains is in glory”** (Second Corinthians 3:9-11).

The law of Moses was the administration of condemnation because it was a legal system, and a single violation condemns a man for being guilty. Christ's law of liberty is based upon faith in Christ, enabling us to be freed from a legal system with God. Therefore, it is much more glorious. Paul speaks more about those things farther in this book. I also explain more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

After describing how qualified the Jews were about the law of God, Paul now shows their hypocrisy. They were hypocrites because they were no more obedient than the Gentiles were. They knew the law and they taught it, but they did not obey it. When he told how the Jews abhorred idols, but robbed temples, he was probably referring to how the Jews cheated God in their temple services.

Boasting in law but disobeying it

- **Thou who boast in law, dishonor God by thy transgression of the law** (Romans 2:23).

Their hypocrisy about the law was bringing dishonor to God. When people see much hypocrisy about something they become very cynical about it. And that was happening with the law of God. The Jews proclaimed its superiority, but then exposed their own contempt for it by their disobedience. Therefore, bringing dishonor to God.

The same thing is happening to the good news of Christ. There is so much disobedience by those who claim to be believers in Jesus that the world has a lower opinion of it. And the scoffers are able to increase their attacks because there are so many scandals among those who claim they are serving Christ.

A modern proverb says that actions speak louder than words. Most people are not fools. They learn to judge more by what is done than by what is said. And the disobedience of the Jews toward the law was causing more dishonor to God than all their words of praise for it. And the sins of those who claim to follow Jesus has brought much reproach to his cause.

God is blasphemed because of you

- **For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written** (Romans 2:24).

There are several places in the Bible that tell how the sins of God's people bring reproach to him. For example, after David's great sin against Uriah, the prophet Nathan said to him, **"... because by this deed thou have given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme ..."** (Second Samuel 12:14).

Another example is how they behaved after their country was defeated and the survivors were taken away captive because of their sins. Jehovah said of them, **"And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. I judged them according to their way and according to their doings."**

"And when they came to the nations where they went, they profaned my holy name, in that men said of them, These are the people of Jehovah, and have gone forth out of his land" (Ezekiel 36:19-20).

Their evil behavior gave them a bad reputation, and that reflected on Jehovah because they were his people. Thus their sins profaned his holy name.

The benefit of circumcision

- **For circumcision is indeed beneficial if thou perform law, but if thou are a transgressor of law, thy circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore a man of uncircumcision keeps the ordinances of the law, will not his uncircumcision be considered circumcision? And the man of natural uncircumcision who fulfills the law, will judge thee, a transgressor of law through a document and circumcision (Romans 2:25-27).**

The command of circumcision was first given to Abraham, the father of the Hebrews. Abraham and his descendents were the people that Jehovah chose to be his own. And circumcision was a visible sign to every Hebrew (every man and every mother of a son) that they belonged to God. That brought his blessings upon them, but only if they obeyed him. For as Paul said, their circumcision was useless when they became a transgressor of law. It was the same as if they were uncircumcised. Meaning they were no more God's people.

Moreover, the uncircumcised man who fulfills the law by living righteously will be considered circumcised in the sight of God. He will belong to God because of his righteousness even though he is uncircumcised. For circumcision is a mere sign of belonging to God. And only the obedient belong to him.

The Israelites were very proud of being God's people. And they had contempt for the Gentiles, whom they commonly called the uncircumcised. Indeed, being called uncircumcised was a derision to them. For example, when David first learned about the challenge of Goliath, he said to the people, **"What shall be done to the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"** (First Samuel 17:26).

Another example is what Jehovah said to his people after their conquest and dispersion: **"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion. Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean"** (Isaiah 52:1). Notice how God associated uncircumcision with uncleanness. He was referring to spiritual uncleanness.

A final example I will give is what happened after Peter converted Cornelius the centurion. The record says, **"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, the men of circumcision contended against him, saying, Thou went in to uncircumcised men, having also eaten with them"** (Acts 11:2-3).

Hence, the uncircumcised Gentiles who are righteous will judge the circumcised Jews who are unrighteous. They will judge and condemn them for their guilt. And the faithless Jews of the world have destroyed the meaning of the sign of circumcision.

Circumcision of the heart

- **For he is not a Jew in what is visible, nor is circumcision in what is visible, in flesh, but he is a Jew in what is hidden, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit not a document, whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29).**

Paul is saying that in the sight of God circumcision of the flesh is not the important thing. And he even gives a new definition of who is a Jew. For in the sight of God, we who are faithful to him are circumcised in our hearts, making us his people. Our circumcised hearts are a sign that we belong to God. Hence, the disciples of Christ are the genuine Jews (the chosen of God), not those who are only circumcised in their flesh.

Consider what Jesus from heaven told John in his vision to say to his faithful disciples: **“Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, those who say themselves to be Jews, and are not, but lie, behold, I will make them so that they will come and bow down before thy feet, and may know that I have loved thee”** (Revelation 3:9).

Those who said they were Jews but were not, were men who were descendents of Abraham in the flesh, but not in the spirit. Their circumcision had become uncircumcision. Hence, they were not authentic Jews in God’s sight. Their circumcision was a mere physical act based upon a legal requirement. But the circumcision that Jehovah gave to Abraham and his descendents was a sign they were his faithful people. Without having their hearts circumcised the circumcision of their flesh was meaningless.

Circumcision is the act of suffering the removal of the protective layer of skin over a part of a man that gives him sensual pleasure. Circumcision of the heart is to suffer the denial of our fleshly lusts and sinful pleasures; not meaning lawful pleasures, but the unlawful ones. And that kind of circumcision is what God requires to belong to him.

The advantage of the Jew

- **What then is the advantage of the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Much every way. First, because they were indeed entrusted with the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the assurance of God ineffective? May it not happen! But let it come to pass God is true, but every man a liar, as it is written, That thou may ever be justified in thy words, and may prevail when thou are criticized** (Romans 3:1-4).

Paul was not saying there was no advantage of the Jew or no benefit of circumcision. For he said there was much every way. It was from them and to them (initially) that God gave his oracles, the words of the Holy Bible. Every book in the Bible was written by them (Luke may have been a proselyte, but nobody knows). Moreover, the unbelief of some did not make the assurance of God ineffective. For God had made many promises to the righteous among them. And the faithlessness of some did not invalidate those promises.

The passage Paul quoted was from the psalms: **“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, I have sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, that thou may be justified when thou speak, and may prevail when thou are criticized”** (Psalm 51:3-4). And those words assure us that even if every man were a liar, God is always faithful and true, just, righteous, and trustworthy. Therefore, never doubt him.

Commending God's righteousness

- **But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what will we say? Is God unrighteous inflicting wrath? (I speak according to a man.) May it not happen! Otherwise how will God judge the world? For if by my lie, the truth of God abounded to his glory, why am I also still judged as sinful, and not (as we are slandered, and as some affirm us to say) that we may do evil so that good things may come (whose condemnation is just)?** (Romans 3:5-8).

Paul even says the unrighteousness of men commends the righteousness of God. It proves that God alone is perfect in righteousness. Consequently, he alone is worthy of praise.

Paul then anticipates the scoffers, who would argue that God is unrighteous to inflict wrath if we sin because it is our sins that commend him. They would say he ought to reward us for proving his perfect righteousness. That is the kind of insidious argument that sinful men make to justify themselves. But it is as flawed as it is ridiculous. For example, any society that excuses and rewards men for their crimes increases lawlessness and the eventual destruction of that society.

If God never judged the world he could never defeat sin. And sin is the cause of all sorrow and death. Doing evil never brings good things to happen. It is twisted and perverted reasoning that would justify sin because it commends the righteousness of God, for the consequences of such evil reasoning would only bring more sorrow and death. Therefore, those who use such reasonings deserve condemnation. They even slandered Paul and his companions by saying they supported such an argument.

All men are under sin

- **What then? Are we better? Not at all. For we already charged both Jews and Greeks to all be under sin, as it is written, There is no righteous man, not even one. There is no man who understands. There is no man who seeks God. All turned away. Together they became useless. There is not a man who does goodness; there is not as much as one** (Romans 3:9-12).

Paul is here showing how every man is guilty before God. For remember, as with Adam a single sin condemns us. Hence, we are no better. Both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) are all under sin, which means no man is sinless. The passage Paul quoted is from the psalms: **"There is none that does good. Jehovah looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there were any who understood, who sought after God. They are all gone aside. They are together become filthy. There is none who does good, no, not one"** (Psalm 14:1-3).

That psalm is not saying that no man is righteous when it says that there is not a man who does goodness. It means none of us is *perfectly* righteous. We are all flawed creatures, having defiled ourselves. Hence we are all under sin, the law of sin. Paul says more about that farther on.

Only the Son of God, Jesus Christ, lived a life of perfect goodness. Therefore, he became qualified to become our redeemer and save us from condemnation. But that is only for those who repent of their sins and follow him.

Great evils

- **Their throat is an open grave. With their tongues they deceive. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes** (Romans 3:13-18).

Those words are from the fourteenth psalm in the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament created before the coming of Christ, and it was widely quoted by the writers of the New Testament. The name Septuagint comes from a Greek word that means “seventy.” Hence, the Septuagint is commonly abbreviated LXX (Roman numerals for 70). The number seventy is significant because history says that is how many Jews were used in the translation.

Here is what Paul quoted from the Septuagint: **“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes”** (Psalm 14:3). (The minor variation in some of the words is insignificant, because every translation has such differences.)

What Paul is saying with that quotation is not that every man is completely wicked and corrupt. He is applying those words to the nature of mankind. He is saying that among mankind some have become exceedingly evil. Therefore, mankind as a whole is unfit for life in heaven, and most will be cast into the lake of fire called hell. That is why God’s people are a select group, chosen from the world by faith in Christ.

All the world is accountable

- **Now we know that as many things as the law says, it says to those in the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become accountable to God. Because from works of law no flesh will be made right before him, for through law is knowledge of sin** (Romans 3:19-20).

Law gives us the intellectual knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. Remember, we are all born with an instinctive knowledge of good and evil, a kind of intuitive law. Hence, we are all accountable to God, and no man has the right to boast of being righteous, perfectly righteous. Hence, our knowledge of law results in every mouth being stopped because we all break law.

Consequently, we will not be made right (pure and sinless) in the sight of God from works of law. For it is law, knowledge of right and wrong, that results in our guilt. As Paul said later, **“... sin is not imputed when there is no law”** (Romans 5:13). Our knowledge of law results in our guilt because we are not strong enough in our spirit to avoid breaking

law, more or less, sometime or another. Only the Son of God was strong enough, proving his moral and spiritual superiority.

Righteousness independent of law

- **But now a righteousness of God has been manifested independent of law, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. And the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all and upon all those who believe, for there is no distinction** (Romans 3:21-22).

The righteousness of God that is independent of law is faith in Jesus Christ. And it was witnessed by the law and the prophets. It was witnessed by Moses when Jehovah said to him, **“I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like thee. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him”** (Deuteronomy 18:18).

It was also witnessed by several prophets, one of which was Jeremiah, who said, **“Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says Jehovah.**

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will give my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Jehovah. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34). That prophecy is quoted in the book of Hebrews as referring to the good news of Christ (see Hebrews 8:10-12).

Farther in this book Paul explains how the righteousness of God has always been through faith in him. And in the book of Galatians Paul explains how the law was only temporary: **“But before faith came we were kept in custody under law, having been confined for faith that was going to be revealed. So that the law became our schoolmaster for Christ, so that we might be made righteous from faith. But faith having come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:23-26).

And that righteousness of God is **“for all and upon all those who believe.”** The righteousness of God through law was given for the Hebrews. The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is for both Hebrews and Gentiles because there is no distinction.

Christ was an expiatory sacrifice

- **For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being made righteous freely by his grace, through the redemption in Christ Jesus,**

whom God set forth an expiatory sacrifice through faith in his blood, for proof of his justice, because of the passing over of the sins that have formerly occurred (in the forbearance of God), for proof of his justice at the present time, for him to be righteous, and who makes the man from Jesus' faith righteous (Romans 3:23-26).

There is no distinction for the righteousness of God because we have all sinned. We must all have faith in his Son Jesus Christ, because he alone is able to redeem us from the condemnation caused by our guilt. And that redemption is made freely to all who believe. For that is how we are made righteous in the sight of God. Moreover, it is a gift of his grace, because no man could ever earn it.

Our redemption is through Christ because God set him forth as an expiatory sacrifice. His ultimate sacrifice on the cross earned him the right to redeem us, because it atoned for our sins. Remember, justice is the very foundation of God's throne. That means his justice supports his right to reign supreme. For without justice he would just be another tyrant, rewarding and punishing by whim and partiality. But our Creator God is not like that, and he does not want us to be like that.

Justice demands that sins be punished, whether they are our sins or the sins of the devil. That is why Satan continually accused us before Christ made his ultimate sacrifice. For in the book of Revelation the apostle John said, **"And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death"** (Revelation 12:10-11).

Satan was cast out of heaven when Christ died upon the cross. And he can no longer accuse us. Indeed, as Paul said, nobody can now accuse us: **"What then will we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not even spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also give us all things with him? Who will accuse against the chosen of God? God is he who makes righteous. Who is he who will condemn? It is Christ who died, but more, who also was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also appeals for us"** (Romans 8:31-34). Nobody can accuse us because Jesus redeemed us.

You see, justice not only demands that sins be punished, but also that righteousness be rewarded. And since Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God, even obeying God by submitting to a cruel death upon the cross, then God was obligated to reward him. That means just as God was obligated to punish us for our guilt, so he was obligated to reward Jesus for his righteousness.

And since Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience, he was given the perfect reward. God not only made him ruler of all things, without the devil or anybody else able to dispute it, but he also gave him the right to redeem from condemnation the souls of all who belong to him. Consider this passage: **"Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is of God"** (First Corinthians 6:19-20).

And Paul said it was the Father **“Who rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins ...”** (Colossians 1:13-14).

God proved his justice by requiring that we either be condemned because of our sins (like Adam was condemned) or be redeemed from condemnation. Our redemption was not an arbitrary act, nor was it partiality toward us. It was because justice demanded he give Jesus the right to redeem all who belong to him. Justice demanded it because Jesus did not deserve to suffer and die. Hence, to compensate for his obedient suffering and death God gave him the right to redeem us. It was proof of his justice.

God proved he was just by passing over our former sins after Jesus’ sacrificial death. God can justify passing over our sins because we belong to Christ. Jesus bought us with his precious blood. As Paul said, we are not our own, but were bought with a price. And only those who belong to Christ can be redeemed. Hence, the devil, the demons, and all other unrepentant sinners will suffer eternal punishment for their guilt.

Therefore, having been redeemed we were made righteous. For our faith in Jesus Christ is what purifies us from our guilt and makes us righteous. And there is nothing else that can do it. For remember, Peter said, **“And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus can save us because only he lived in perfect obedience to earn that right.

And the forbearance of God caused him to pass over the sins that formerly occurred because he knew that his only begotten Son Jesus Christ would redeem us. God does not immediately condemn us to death when we sin. He waits to see if we repent and are worthy of the redemption of Christ. For that redemption is retroactive to all the righteous souls who lived before. Thus, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and all other men judged worthy are now redeemed by Christ.

When Paul said that we had all come short of the glory of God, he meant that none of us has lived to our potential. God knows what we are capable of doing whatever may be our circumstances. He knows how righteous and fruitful we can be, because he made us. Indeed, before he even made the world he foresaw our existence. Moreover, he foresaw our potential. And living to our highest potential fulfills his glory because he made us. But none of us ever live to that potential. We all come short of the glory of God. I speak much more about those things in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

Righteousness is now of faith

- **Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. By what law, of works? No, but by a law of faith. We therefore consider a man to be made righteous by faith independent of works of law** (Romans 3:27-28).

Thus, no man can boast, because no man deserves salvation. No man can earn it by obeying a law of works, because no man can live in perfect obedience. It is too hard for every man. Only God’s Son had the strength of spirit to do it. Therefore, we can only be made righteous by our faith in Christ, because only those who belong to him can be redeemed.

We are made righteous by our faith in Jesus Christ, not by attempting to obey a legal system—works of law—because no man obeys them perfectly.

Faith saves both Jews and Gentiles

- **Or is God of Jews only and not also of Gentiles? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one, who will make the man of circumcision righteous from faith, and the man of uncircumcision through faith** (Romans 3:29-30).

God had chosen Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrew race, to be his special people to preserve righteousness upon the earth. He set them apart from the rest of the world. He chose them to be a kingdom of priests.

Here is what the record says happened after Jehovah brought his people out of Egyptian bondage to mount Sinai: **“And Moses went up to God. And Jehovah called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus thou shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself.**

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be my own possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shall speak to the sons of Israel.

“And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which Jehovah commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that Jehovah has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:3-8).

However, the people did not obey him and keep his covenant with them. Only a small minority sought to be faithful to him. And even they were not able to obey perfectly, which meant the devil could accuse all of them. Therefore, God sent his only begotten Son from heaven to bring a new covenant of his righteousness that is not based upon a legal system. And that new covenant is for all men who believe in him and his Son Jesus Christ, not just for one race of people.

Our faith establishes law

- **Do we then make law void through faith? May it not happen! Instead, we establish law** (Romans 3:31).

Paul now assures us that God’s new covenant of faith in Christ does not make law void. It does not abolish the necessity of our obedience to God’s commandments of righteousness. Indeed, it actually establishes those commandments.

However, that does not mean the law of Moses continues to be in effect, because the law of Moses contains many statutes and ordinances that are not necessary for righteousness. For example, the animal sacrifices that were commanded are no longer in effect. Nevertheless, the foundation of God’s righteousness, such as the ten commandments are still in effect (but not as part of a legal system). And our faith in Christ keeps them working.

Moreover, our faith in Christ leads us to obey those commandments more faithfully. Our faith establishes God's laws of righteousness. By trusting his Son Jesus Christ, we actually become more obedient to his laws of righteousness than men who trust in legal systems. Indeed, the facts prove that Christians are more obedient to God's laws of righteousness than are the Jews who trust their law of Moses.

Abraham's faith made him righteous

- **What then will we say Abraham, our father according to flesh, to have found? For if Abraham was made righteous from works, he has a boast, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (Romans 4:1-3).**

Paul now shows how faith in God has always been superior to legal systems. Abraham was the founding father of the Hebrew race, from whom the Jews came. But Abraham was not made righteous from his works. It was his faith in God that made him righteous. It was Abraham's faith that God reckoned to him for righteousness. It was not his obedience to a set of rules.

Paul said that if Abraham was made righteous from works, from obedience to a set of rules, a legal system, then he could boast that he earned God's blessings. But as good a man as Abraham was, he was not perfect. It was his belief in God that made him righteous.

Consider children, it is not their perfect obedience that approves them to their righteous parents. It is their love and trust that approves them. When children have no love and trust in their righteous parents that is what causes grief. And such children inevitably become very sinful. It is genuine faith in God that keeps us righteous. Meaning a faith that is not simple belief, but a faith that includes trust and the desire to obey.

Faith versus works

- **Now to the man being employed, the wage is not reckoned according to grace, but according to obligation. But to the man not being employed, but who believes in him who makes the impious man righteous, his faith is reckoned for righteousness (Romans 4:4-5).**

When a man is hired to perform a job, his wage is not considered a gift but an obligation. Whoever hired the man is obligated to pay the wage. God commanded his Son Jesus Christ to live in this world, experience all of its trials and temptations, do good bearing fruit for righteousness, and eventually die unjustly on a cross. Jesus obeyed perfectly, never sinning. Therefore, God was obligated to pay him. And part of his payment was our redemption. Remember, we **"were bought with a price"** (First Corinthians 6:20). And that price was part of the wage Jesus received for his perfect life of obedience to God.

On the other hand, God has no obligations to us. He owes us nothing because we have all **"sinned and come short of the glory of God ..."** (Romans 3:23). Indeed, our disobedience to his will for us deserves punishment. By attempting to earn his blessings by obeying a legal system, we condemn ourselves as being unrighteous. We condemn ourselves because we do not fulfill our obligation to obey completely (to live without sin).

However, instead of trying to obey a set of rules, when we put our faith in him and trust whatever he does, that makes us righteous. He makes us righteous even if we had been impious. He makes us righteous when we repent and believe in his Son Jesus Christ. For Jesus has redeemed all who belong to him. He paid all of our debts to God. Those debts were caused by our sins, because sin always causes harm to what God created.

Not imputing our sins

- **Just as David also tells the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness independent of works, saying, Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is a man to whom the Lord does, no, not impute sin (Romans 4:6-8).**

All men are offspring of God but not all are his sons, because in the Bible there is a difference. Sons have the best relationship with their fathers, and they enjoy special privileges. As disciples of Christ we are sons of God because he adopts us to be his children. (All men are born sons of God, but we lose our eternal sonship when we first sin.)

Paul spoke about that farther in this book: **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly”** (Romans 8:14-17). We are children of God on the earth. But we are sons of God in heaven, because the female form is a temporary one for this world only.

I mention those things because that is why our iniquities are forgiven. It is also why our sins are covered and God does not impute sin against us. He is treating us as sons, and not as hirelings and servants. Sin is like crime against God. And committing a single crime makes a man a criminal. However, as disciples of Christ, God does not classify our infractions as crimes because we are God’s sons. He does not impute our sins.

God does not impute our sins because we are his sons. And what father treats his son as a criminal when he does something against his will? Societies have legal systems. And whoever breaks their laws is a criminal. However, family members do not function together with a legal system. They function together with mutual love and trust. Hence, when sons disobey their fathers they are not treated as criminals. They are chastened but not rejected. And so it is with God and those who belong to Christ.

Circumcision as a sign

- **Is this blessedness therefore upon men of circumcision, or also upon men of uncircumcision? For we say, Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.**
- **And he received the sign of circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness of his faith during uncircumcision, for him to be father of all those who believe**

during uncircumcision (for righteousness to also be imputed to them), and father of those of circumcision, to those not only of circumcision, but also to those who march in the steps of faith—of that during the uncircumcision of our father Abraham (Romans 4:9-12).

Abraham had faith in God before he was circumcised. And that faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, not circumcision. Circumcision was simply a sign. It was **“a seal of the righteousness of his faith during uncircumcision.”** Hence, it was not circumcision that made Abraham righteous before God. It was his faith, which he had both before and after his circumcision.

Hence, he became the father of all who believe being uncircumcised, and of all who believe being circumcised. He is the father of all who believe regardless of circumcision. It is our faith that is significant not circumcision.

God commanded Abraham and his biological descendants to be circumcised. It was a sign that he had chosen them to be his special people. However, God’s special people now are those who belong to Christ. And the only sign of our righteousness is our marching in the steps of faith, the same kind of faith that Abraham had. The world can see that we belong to God when they see our faith, a visible faith seen by our obedience to God.

God’s promise was through faith

- **For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, for him to be heir of the world, was not through law, but through a righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13).**

Abraham was not under a legal system. The law of Moses came centuries after Abraham. God gave him a few commandments, but not a legal system. It was because of Abraham’s faith that God gave him promised blessings, including the one that he would be heir of the world.

God said that Abraham would be heir of the world, but Jesus also said, **“Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). Hence, we too are heirs with Abraham. As Paul said in another book, **“And if ye are Christ’s, then ye are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise”** (Galatians 3:29).

How are we heirs of the world to inherit the earth? That could not mean this world, because this world is going to pass away. It can only mean the new earth. For Peter said: **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13). And that makes the promised blessing even greater, inconceivably greater. And it is available to us, not through a legal system, but through a righteousness of faith. That means our faith in Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

Nevertheless remember, it must be a living faith of obedience to his will. For James said, **“So also faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself”** (James 2:17).

The law works wrath

- **For if those from law are heirs, faith has been made void, and the promise has been made useless. For the law works wrath. For where there is no law, neither is there transgression** (Romans 4:14-15).

There can be no transgression if there is no law to transgress. And for those who belong to Jesus Christ, we are not under law to God. The law works wrath because not one man who ever lives is able to obey law perfectly. Only Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was able. He was able because he is the Son of God. He was able because of the great strength of his moral and spiritual character.

Therefore, since no man is able to obey a legal system perfectly, that means every man becomes guilty. And justice demands that the guilty be punished. That is why law works wrath. And that is why our freedom from law with God is such a great blessing. But that freedom is only for those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, **“if those from law are heirs, faith has been made void, and the promise has been made useless.”** The promise would be made useless because every man under law becomes guilty. Which means no man would be worthy of the promised inheritance. The Jews foolishly keep their hope in the law of Moses. Yet every one of them disobeys it, not only a few of them, but most of its commandments. And their disobedience condemns them. How then can they have any hope in that law? Actually, most of them have given up entirely and have become atheists, including most of the citizens of Israel.

Abraham is father of many nations

- **Because of this it is from faith, so that it is according to grace, in order for the promise to be sure to all the seed, not only to the seed from the law, but also to the seed from the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed, of God who makes the dead alive, and who calls things not existing, as existing. Who, against hope, believed in hope, in order for him to become father of many nations according to that which was spoken, So thy seed will be** (Romans 4:16-18).

Because of our spiritual weakness, compared with Christ, the promise of our inheritance could only be made sure through our faith. And that also means it is according to grace because we cannot earn it. No man can boast of deserving the promised inheritance. It only becomes sure because God promised to give it to us when we believe in his Son Jesus Christ and obey him.

And a wonderful thing about that good news of Christ is the justice of it. For Jesus earned the right to redeem us, so that now God can justly and impartially give us the promised inheritance. Moreover, unrepentant sinners remain justly condemned because they refuse to believe in him.

Abraham was made a father of many nations by becoming the father of all who have faith in God. Abraham is not just the father of the Hebrew people, but of faithful souls from

many nations. For his faith was powerful. As Paul said, it was against hope that he believed in hope. That means when things looked hopeless he still had hope. His faith in God kept his belief in hope. Paul explains in the next passage how things looked hopeless for him to have seed, meaning to ever have a son.

Our faith is in Almighty God, **“who makes the dead alive, and who calls things not existing, as existing.”** As God raised Jesus from the dead, so also he will raise us from the dead, not our flesh but our spirit. Almighty God can also call things not existing, as existing. For that is how he created the world. He is truly the Almighty.

Abraham did not waver in unbelief

- **And not being weak in faith he did not regard his body, which was now deadened (being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. And he did not waver in unbelief at the promise of God, but became strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was reckoned to him for righteousness (Romans 4:19-22).**

Abraham and his wife Sarah were so old that their reproductive organs were no longer functional. They were physically incapable of having children. Yet the faith of Abraham did not weaken. He **“did not waver in unbelief at the promise of God”** Indeed, his faith became strong and he gave glory to God. He gave him glory because he was fully assured that what God had promised him, he was able also to perform.

God had gradually given Abraham experiences to strengthen his faith. He did not demand that Abraham have such faith without having evidence to support it. For example, Jehovah told Abraham about the impending doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, which certainly strengthened his faith. And for every righteous soul such experiences strengthen their faith. God does not want us to have a blind faith in him. Our faith is based upon solid evidence. And the Bible record has the greatest evidence to support faith in him.

Abraham’s faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. And that is what God wants of each one of us. He does not want simple obedience to a set of rules. He wants us to love and trust him, to have faith in him and his righteousness. Simple obedience to a set of rules does not guarantee righteousness. For men are clever enough to find ways to sin even without breaking rules. David broke no law when he arranged to have Uriah killed in battle, yet it was still a great sin (see Second Samuel 11).

David’s faith in God wavered when he succumbed to temptation and was faced with a possible scandal about it. He had apparently become too proud in his successes. And that pride blinded him from his trust in God. When God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke David, he humbled himself and repented. He never lost his faith, but it did waver. And that weakness cause him to sin a great sin. The faith of Abraham never wavered.

Our faith is also our righteousness

- **Now it was not written because of him alone that it was imputed to him, but also because of us to whom it is going to be imputed, to those who believe in**

him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised up for our justification (Romans 4:23-25).

Remember the passage that says, “**Blessed is a man to whom the Lord does, no, not impute sin.**” That passage was not written for Abraham alone, but for all who believe in the Lord. He will not impute sin against us when we believe in him. For it was God who delivered Jesus up for our offenses, and who raised Jesus our Lord up from the dead for our justification. It was for our justification because when Jesus submitted to that ordeal he earned the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins, we who believe in him, making us righteous before God.

Peace with God through Christ

- **Therefore having been made righteous from faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith for this grace in which we stand, and we take pride in hope of the glory of God** (Romans 5:1-2).

We have peace toward God through Christ because he redeemed us. For without his redemption all men must endure the wrath of God because all men have offended him. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we have this grace: his wonderful gift of redemption. Hence, instead of having fear and dread of death, we take pride in our hope of enjoying the glory of God in the afterlife. For through Christ we become sons of God for eternity.

When Paul said we take pride he was not using the word in its sense of arrogance. Here are the first parts of the definition of pride taken from Webster’s New World dictionary:

An unduly high opinion of oneself; exaggerated self-esteem; conceit; arrogance; proper respect for oneself; sense of one’s own dignity or worth; self respect; delight or satisfaction in one’s own or another’s achievements, in associations, etc.; a person or thing in which pride is taken.

Part of the definition of pride is “delight or satisfaction in one’s own or another’s achievements.” Hence, we take pride in hope of the glory of God by delighting in that hope.

Pride in our tribulations

- **And not only so, but we also take pride in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given to us** (Romans 5:3-5).

We even take pride (satisfaction) in our tribulations because they produce perseverance. A modern proverb of athletes says, “No pain no gain.” That means if body training is not difficult and strenuous, then it has no effect on development. Paul taught that truth when he said that our tribulations produce perseverance. He was applying it to our spiritual development. Our tribulations actually make us stronger, better able to persevere in our righteousness.

Paul also said our perseverance produces character. Character refers to the strength and quality of our morality. And Paul said it is our perseverance during our trials and tribulations that strengthens our character, the strength and quality of our morality. And that enables us to better live righteously according to the will of God.

Hence, the tribulations we face produce in us perseverance, and that strengthens our character which leads us to live as God would have us. And that obedience to his will gives us hope of a better life in heaven with him. And that hope we have will never disappoint us, **“because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given to us.”**

That means our love of God will keep that hope strong in our hearts. That love for him is a gift given through the influence of the Holy Spirit which he poured out in our hearts. The Holy Spirit influences our heart by the knowledge we have of the word of God, and by our strengthened conscience and desire to obey God. And that enables us to have that great hope, because Jesus promised that for all who love him. And he keeps his promises.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth. And he said the world could not receive it: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17).

Only we who belong to Christ can receive the Holy Spirit of God. And having his Holy Spirit in us makes us a part of God, having a oneness with him. As Jesus said to his apostles during the time of the last supper, **“And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me”** (John 17:20-21). I speak much more about the Holy Spirit in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Christ died for us

- **For while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the impious. For scarcely for a righteous man will some man die; indeed perhaps for the good man some man would even dare to die. But God commends his love toward us, that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, now having been made righteous by his blood, we will be saved from the wrath through him** (Romans 5:6-9).

The weakness Paul speaks about is spiritual weakness, which is a result of both moral weakness and a lack of knowledge. The world has always been spiritually weak and impious. Nevertheless, when God decided the time was right, he sent his Son Jesus Christ to sacrifice his life for us. God sacrificed his only begotten Son because he loves mankind and wants to save us.

But remember, his salvation is only through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. As John said, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not that he might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved**

through him. He who believes in him is not condemned. He who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

And now, having been made righteous by the sacrifice of his Son, we will be saved from God’s wrath through him. For all who reject Christ remain condemned, and will suffer that wrath. And regarding that wrath, consider these words from the book of Hebrews, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31).

Reconciled to God

- **For if, while being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more having been reconciled we will be saved by his life. And not only so, but also taking pride in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:10-11).**

It was through the death of God’s Son that we were able to be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. And having been redeemed that enabled us to be reconciled to God. For our sins separated us from him. As Isaiah said, **“Behold, Jehovah’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he will not hear”** (Isaiah 59:1-2).

But now our redemption through his Son Jesus Christ has reconciled us to him. And as Paul said, if the death of Christ reconciled us to God, then the life of Christ will give us the greatest salvation, which is eternal life in heaven with him.

And that gives us great pride in our God through our Lord Jesus Christ. For it was through him that we received our reconciliation. We have great pride in our God because who else can give us eternal life in the new and perfect heaven and earth.

Therefore, when we boast let us boast in God our heavenly Father and have great pride in him. For a passage in the book of Jeremiah says, **“Thus says Jehovah: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Jehovah who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth. For in these things I delight, says Jehovah”** (Jeremiah 9:23-24). And as Paul said, **“... it is written, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord”** (First Corinthians 1:31).

Death is through sin

- **Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, in that all sinned. For until law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam’s transgression, who is a type of the coming man (Romans 5:12-14).**

Remember, Paul uses the word law in two ways. One kind is like the law of Moses, which contains statutes and ordinances that we learn. However, another kind of law is our intuitive knowledge of good and evil. And we are all born with that knowledge, although like walking it takes a while to develop.

Now Paul said that death passed to all men because all men sinned. Adam ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil prematurely, before he was ready. And since he was the prototype man, all men now also obtain knowledge of good and evil prematurely, before we are ready. We obtain it by instinct during the first years of our lives. And remember, that knowledge is a kind of law of God. And because we are so young (and spiritually weak) that knowledge sometimes leads us to choose wrong instead of right, to violate that law of God. Consequently, we all receive the sentence of death.

Dear reader, do not criticize God for those things. For Paul said later in the book of Romans, **“For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all. O the depth of wealth, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond finding out!”** (Romans 11:32-33). God will change our curse of death into a blessing of life. All of these things are part of his wonderful plan to qualify us to become his sons for eternity. I speak much more about those things in my comments about that passage, and in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Adam sinned against a direct command of God, and that caused his death. However, men also sin against our instinctive knowledge of good and evil. That kind of sin is not like that of Adam’s transgression. Nevertheless, because we all sin that way, then death reigned even before God gave the law of Moses. Remember, God did not give the people of the antediluvian world a law. Yet he still destroyed them because of their sins. They sinned against their intuitive knowledge of good and evil.

Paul said that Adam was a type of the coming man. Few people think of Adam as the son of God. Yet that is what the Bible calls him. For the last few words of Luke’s genealogy of Jesus say, **“... the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God”** (Luke 3:38). Hence, Adam is a type of the coming man, which coming man is Jesus Christ.

Adam was the prototype man of the flesh; Jesus was the prototype man of the spirit; both being sons of God. It was through Adam that we became sons of God of the flesh, although when we sin we lose our sonship. It is through Christ that we become sons of God of the spirit. For it is through him that we receive the adoption (see Romans 8:15).

The gift in grace of the Christ

- **But in this way also, the gift is not as the transgression. For if by the trespass of the one man the many died, much more the grace of God, and the gift in grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many** (Romans 5:15).

Because of the trespass of Adam many souls have died. They died because they could not manage their knowledge of good and evil, which Adam obtained prematurely for mankind. Nevertheless, the grace of God sent his Son into the world to earn the right to redeem mankind. And the grace of Jesus gives us that redemption whenever we commit our lives

to him. For his grace is sufficiently abundant for all men, for all who believe in him. Hence, the gift is not like the transgression. For the gift gives life; the transgression gave death.

Death through Adam, life through Christ

- **And the gift is not as through one man who sinned, for indeed the judgment from one man was for condemnation, but the gift from many offenses is for righteousness. For if, by the offense of the one man, death reigned through the one man, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:16-17).**

It was Adam's offense that has caused death to reign. It reigns because no man is able to manage our innate knowledge of good and evil perfectly. Consequently, we sin and receive the condemnation of death, which means death reigns over all mankind; for we all die. Thus, the judgment from the one man Adam was for the condemnation of all mankind.

However, those who have faith in Christ receive the abundance of God's grace and the gift of righteousness. We receive the abundance of God's grace because we belong to his Son Jesus Christ and will reign with him. And we receive the gift of righteousness by our redemption. It was Jesus who purified us by his great redeeming sacrifice. Hence, we were made righteous in the sight of God, no longer having any sins to condemn us.

And so the gift is not like the consequences of Adam's sin, which caused death to reign. As Paul said, **"... the gift from many offenses is for righteousness."** The gift was our redemption through Christ, which was needed for us because of the many offenses we have committed against God. And that gift is given for us to live righteously, away from sin. It was because of our many offenses that God sent his Son into the world to bring us life not death. His great sacrifice made us righteous before God by redeeming us from the condemnation of our sins. And his redemption is a free gift to all who believe and obey him.

Condemnation and justification

- **So then, as through an offense of one man was for condemnation for all men, so also through a righteousness of one man was for justification of life for all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were led sinful, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be led righteous (Romans 5:18-19).**

Paul says virtually the same thing in those two statements. He compared the consequences of the offense and disobedience of the one man (Adam) to the consequences of the righteousness and obedience of the one man (Jesus).

One man's offense led the many to be sinful. Paul said "the many" instead of all because Jesus never sinned. Paul also said that the offense of the one man was for condemnation

for all men. He may have said all men because even Jesus was condemned to die, although he was condemned unjustly by sinners. Jesus was condemned to die because that was necessary for our salvation. It qualified him to become our redeemer.

The obedience of the one man led the many to be righteous. Paul said “the many” because not all men will be led righteous. They will not be led righteous because they choose to remain unbelievers and unrepentant sinners.

Paul also said the righteousness of the one man was for justification of life for all men. The righteousness of Jesus was to justify God’s gift of eternal life for us. It was justified because Jesus earned the right to redeem us. And he has the right to redeem all men if they repent and believe in him. All men have that potential, but not all men avail themselves of it.

Paul shows how God cannot be criticized for allowing one man to cause the condemnation of all men. He cannot be criticized because one man also brought justification of life for all men. The consequences of the righteousness of the one man Jesus counteracted the consequences of the disobedience of the one man Adam. The condemnation of death was defeated by the justification of life. And that also served to prove indisputably that the Son of God deserves to reign supreme because he proved his moral and spiritual superiority, which Satan was constantly challenging in heaven. He can no longer challenge him in heaven, because Jesus proved him wrong and guilty. Thus, he was cast out of heaven. Nevertheless, Satan continues to challenge Christ among men here upon the earth.

Why law was given

- **And the law entered so that the offense might abound** (Romans 5:20).

It is reasonable to ask why God would want offenses to abound. God wants the offenses of his unrepentant enemies to abound. That way the justice of their condemnation would be indisputable. Consider what Jehovah said about his people Israel: **“Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes, and had profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers’ idols. Moreover I also gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they will not live”** (Ezekiel 20:23-25).

Notice how Jehovah said he gave them statutes that **“were not good,”** and ordinances **“in which they will not live.”** The many statutes and ordinances of the law of Moses were given to the people of Israel because they were so rebellious against him. As Paul said, **“And the law entered so that the offense might abound.”** Having many laws results in many offenses.

Few people realize that most of the law of Moses was given to punish the people. Those laws were given to increase offenses which would condemn them. They were given to them so **“they will not live.”** That is why the law of Moses was abolished with the establishment of the kingdom of God, which upon the earth is the church.

Consider also the passage that Jesus quoted from Isaiah: **“Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing**

ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive.

“For this people’s heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:13-16). God did not want them to turn and be healed because they hated him and his righteousness.

And consider what the Lord said to John in his vision of heaven: **“Let the man doing wrong still do wrong, and let the filthy man still be filthy. And let the righteous man still do righteousness, and let the holy man still be holy. Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man as his work will be—I, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”** (Revelation 22:11-13).

God wants the man doing wrong to still do wrong, and the filthy man to still be filthy. He wants them that way because they are unrepentant rebels against him. And he wants their just condemnation to be indisputable. God wants all men to repent, and he will save those who will. But for the hard hearted and unrepentant he wants them condemned. God wants the devil and all of his disciples condemned. And he wants the justice of their condemnation to be indisputable, even though sinners try to dispute it.

God’s grace reigns

- **But where sin abounded, grace was more abundant, so that, as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign, through righteousness, for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord** (Romans 5:21).

Although sin abounds in this rebellious world, God’s grace is more abundant. For it is capable of saving every soul, and saving them justly. Sin reigns in death because the consequence of every sin is death. And since every man sins, then sin has reign over us because we all die even if we resist death. That is how sin reigns in death.

Although sin reigns in death, grace reigns for eternal life through Christ. Although every man must die because of sin, every man who belongs to Christ will be given the grace of eternal life. Our flesh will die because of sin, but our spirit will live with God forever.

And just as justice demanded death for sin, so justice demands eternal life for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Justice requires our salvation because Jesus redeemed us and bought our souls. For remember, Paul said, **“Ye were bought with a price ...”** (First Corinthians 7:23). Justice requires that God save the souls of all who belong to Christ. It was part of his reward for perfect obedience to him.

We are saved by belonging to Christ, but not because we earned it. It is a free gift to us because of his abounding grace. For justice does not demand that Jesus save our souls. Our salvation is a free gift of his grace to all who believe in him. Now even though our salvation is a free gift of his grace, nevertheless we are still required to make ourselves worthy of that salvation. And that means repenting of our sins and living in faith and obedience to him for the rest of our lives.

Died to sin

- **What will we say then? We continue in sin so that grace may abound? May it not happen! How will we who died to sin, still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2).**

Only foolish men would suggest continuing to sin that grace may abound. Yet there will always be wicked men who would try to lead people astray by saying that we imply doing such a thing. Hence, Paul needed to state clearly that we cannot live in sin, because we have died to it. Of course, that does not mean we can never become reprobate and turn away from Christ. We cannot live in sin if we want to remain in Christ.

Buried with Christ for newness of life

- **Or are ye ignorant that as many as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into his death? We were buried therefore with him through the immersion into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life. For if we have become co-planted in the likeness of his death, then we will also be of the resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).**

That is a marvelous passage to illustrate the meaning of the rite of immersion in water for the remission of our sins. That immersion in water symbolizes (1) our death to sin, (2) our burial as a result of that death, and (3) our being raised up from that symbolic death so that we may walk in newness of life. Our immersion in water is a figure of being buried with him, being co-planted in the likeness of his death. And our submission to that burial enables us to also be co-raised in a resurrection with him.

False teachers attempt to pervert that rite by using sprinkling or pouring. That completely destroys the symbolism of a death, burial, and resurrection. Sprinkling and pouring will never substitute for the command to be immersed in water for the remission of sins. No man is ever buried by a little sprinkling and pouring over him.

I fear those who fail to be immersed properly will be like the man in the parable who was not properly dressed for the wedding. Remember that part of the story: **“But when the king came in to see those who were dining, he saw there a man who was not clothed with a wedding garment. And he says to him, Friend, how did thou come in here not having a wedding garment? But he was speechless. Then the king said to the helpers, After binding him hands and feet, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:11-13).**

The man in that parable accepted the invitation to the wedding, but he neglected to be properly dressed. Accepting the invitation was not enough. Consequently, he was cast out into the outer darkness. And I fear the same thing will happen to believers who are not properly prepared because they neglected to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins. Therefore, be not foolish and neglect that simple act, lest you too be rejected.

Our old man was crucified with him

- **Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be inactivated, no longer to enslave us to sin. For he who has died has been made righteous away from sin. And if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no more has dominion over him. For that he died, he died to sin once, but that he lives, he lives to God** (Romans 6:6-10).

Our “old man” refers to when we lived to indulge the lusts of our flesh (our body of sin). But when we commit our lives to Christ, then we symbolically crucify the old man of us. That means we inactivate or suppress our lusts of the flesh. And that frees us from our bondage to sin.

Remember, our immersion in water for the remission of our sins symbolizes the death of the old man. And that death makes us righteous away from sin. It makes us righteous away from sin because that change of our heart destroys the power of our fleshly lusts to cause us to sin. And by dying with Christ that way, then we will also live with him.

For Christ was raised from the dead to die no more. Death took control of him (had dominion over his body of flesh) when he died. But he was raised from the dead. Therefore, death no more has dominion over him because he will never die again. Death will take control of each one of us when we die. But when we belong to Christ we will be raised with him to never die again.

Jesus died in obedience to the will of his Father so that he could condemn sin. For he proved that sin was not inevitable. As Paul said later in this book, Jesus “**condemned sin in the flesh ...**” (Romans 8:3). Sin is disobedience to the will of God. And Jesus proved once and for all that a man can live without disobeying him; he can live without sinning. Therefore, all disobedience to God (sin) deserves to be condemned.

The world proclaims otherwise. For sinners are constantly giving excuses for their sins. Many of them even blame God. But Jesus proved that no man can justify or excuse his sins.

Dead to sin, living to God

- **So also ye, reckon yourselves to be indeed dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body in order to obey it, in its lusts. And do not present your body-parts as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God, as living out of the dead, and your body-parts as instruments of righteousness to God, for sin will not have dominion over you. For ye are not under law, but under grace** (Romans 6:11-14).

We reckon ourselves dead to sin when we reject and forsaken it. As faithful disciples of Christ we turn away from sin. We reckon ourselves dead to it because it no longer has any power over us. We will still be tempted to sin in this body of flesh, but our faith in Christ

enables us to reject it. Hence, sin no longer has the power to reign over us, causing us to obey it in its lusts. The world sins because sin lives in them and reigns over them. But we reckon ourselves to have died to it. And we now live to God in Christ Jesus our Lord; we now obey him, not the lusts of sin.

God has given us a marvelous body capable of doing many things. But unlike animals and machines, we are made in the image of God, having the gift of free will. That means we can choose to obey him or not. We can live to indulge our lusts in disobedience to him using our body-parts as instruments of unrighteousness, or we can use our body-parts as instruments of righteousness to serve him. Sinners are dominated by sin because they live for the lusts of their flesh. But our faith in Christ frees us from the dominion of sin over us. We oppose our sinful lusts for the great hope he has given us.

The world uses their bodies in disobedience to indulge their lusts. For those sinful lusts have dominion over them, causing them to commit many sins. But as disciples of Christ we reckon ourselves dead to sin, which means it no longer has dominion over us. Our will has chosen to forsake sin. Hence, we no longer do it. It no longer leads us about as it does the people of the world. Open your eyes and you will see how much the world is led about by their sinful lusts. Yet they wonder why there is so much evil. And many of them foolishly blame God for it.

Under grace not law

- **For ye are not under law, but under grace** (Romans 6:14).

Not only does our faith cause us to reckon ourselves dead to sin, willfully resisting it, but Paul also said that sin would not have dominion over us because we are not under law but under grace. Sin will not have dominion over us because we are not under law to God. That means whatever occasional transgression we may now commit against God is not reckoned as sin. He does not judge us by a legal system. We are his children, and under grace with him. Therefore, our occasional offenses are not considered sins causing condemnation. Remember, Paul said, “... **sin is not imputed when there is no law**” (Romans 5:13). And as disciples of Christ we are not under a legal system with God.

God does not reject and condemn us when we offend him. Instead he chastens us, as the author of Hebrews said: “**And have ye forgotten the exhortation that reasons with you as with sons, My son, do not disparage the chastening of the Lord, nor become disheartened when punished by him? For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?**” (Hebrews 12:5-7).

Instead of rejecting and condemning us when we offend him, he chastens us. That is because we are his children, and are given his loving kindness. We are not tried and judged by a legal system. We are not under law, but under grace. But that is only as long as we remain faithful to him. For Paul said we can fall from his grace (see Galatians 5:4), but that is only by our own free will.

Bondmen to what ye obey

- **What then? May we sin, because we are not under law but under grace? May it not happen! Know ye not, that to what ye present yourselves as bondmen for obedience, ye are bondmen to what ye obey, whether of sin for death, or of obedience for righteousness? (Romans 6:15-16).**

Not being under law does not mean we are free to indulge our sinful lusts. Being under the grace of God is for those who love, trust, and obey him. When we love God we want to obey him. And when we trust God we will obey him because we believe he knows what is best for us.

Paul said that we were bondmen to what we obey. Jesus also said to the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that every man who does the sin is a bondman of the sin”** (John 8:34). What Jesus and Paul meant was that sin will enslave the man who practices it. Sin will slowly but surely become so strong in him that he cannot quit. It becomes a dominating compulsion, an addiction. It enslaves the man.

Jesus said that every man who sins is a bondman of the sin. Paul went farther and said that we were bondmen to what we obey. What he said includes both sin and righteousness. For just as a man can become a bondman to sin, so also he can become a bondman to righteousness. Doing righteousness can gradually become a part of a man. It can become so strong that he does not want to quit.

Sinners do not realize the joy that kind of compulsion can bring—our being servile to righteousness. For as sin will gradually drag a man down into more and more degradation, so also righteousness will gradually elevate a man to more and more life and glory. Habitual righteousness strengthens its pleasures. And the pleasures of righteousness cannot be surpassed. Scoffers deny it, but they are blind fools who cannot experience it because they are scoffers.

I describe the process of habit development in much more detail in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

Free from sin, servile to righteousness

- **But thanks to God, that ye were bondmen of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart a model of doctrine for which ye were delivered. And having been set free from sin, ye were made servile to righteousness (I speak man-like because of the weakness of your flesh) (Romans 6:17-19).**

A bondman is a man who serves his master. Even men who are not legally bound as bondmen, when they serve another man they are in practice bondmen to him. And when we sin then we are in practice bondmen of sin. But genuine repentance and obedience to the good news of Christ, his model of doctrine, sets us free from sin. It is our obedience from the heart that causes us to forsake sin. And when we no longer sin then we are freed from it.

And being freed from sin we then live righteously. And our practice of righteousness in a sense means we are servile to righteousness. However, being servile to righteousness is

nothing like being servile to sin. For service to righteousness leads to life and progress, while service to sin leads to death and destruction.

Paul said he used that kind of human reasoning because of the weakness of our flesh. What he meant was that in our human condition we are limited in understanding many of the great spiritual things of the kingdom of God. For our relationship with sin and righteousness is more complicated than that simple comparison. Nevertheless, it does illustrate how we become attached to the things we choose, and divorced from the things we reject.

Presenting your body-parts

- **For as ye presented your body-parts servile to uncleanness, and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present your body-parts servile to righteousness for sanctification** (Romans 6:19).

Paul here shows how sin is uncleanness and lawlessness—unclean and lawless in the sight of God. For the world does not judge the way God judges. Things unclean and lawless in his sight are often considered good and right in the sight of the men. And then they wonder why there is so much evil in the world.

They cannot see because they have been blinded, as Paul said: **“But even if our good news is concealed, it is concealed in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, in order for the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ (who is a likeness of God) not to shine forth to them”** (Second Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul spoke of presenting our body-parts in what we serve. Remember, every man consists of a body of flesh and a divine spirit that is eternal. It is our eternal spirit that is our enduring self. And it has the power (although certainly not absolute) to control our flesh. That is why Paul spoke of our flesh in terms of body-parts; it is the lesser part of us, being only a temporary housing for our eternal spirit.

Nevertheless, God will judge us by how we present our body-parts. Sinners present them servile to uncleanness and lawlessness. And they will be condemned as Jesus warned: **“The Son of man will send forth his agents, and they will gather out of his kingdom all the stumbling-blocks, and those doing lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 13:41-42).

But as disciples of Christ, we present our body-parts servile to righteousness for sanctification, purifying us and making us holy. Consequently, God will reward us, which is what Jesus said after his warning about sin: **“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 13:43). We will also be given new bodies, imperishable bodies. For Paul said, **“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in the perishable, it is raised in imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:42). But that is only for those who have been sanctified by presenting their body-parts servile to righteousness.

Being uninhibited by righteousness

- **For when ye were bondmen of sin, ye were uninhibited by righteousness. What fruit therefore did ye have then, of which things ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death** (Romans 6:20-21).

Righteousness inhibits sin. It prevents us from disobeying the commands of God. Inhibition is good to have about many things. For example, alcoholic beverages reduce inhibitions. That is why drunkards become fools and act dangerously. A completely uninhibited man becomes a wild maniac. Inhibitions are part of having self-control. For that reason many of the nerve cells of our brain are inhibitors.

Being uninhibited by righteousness produces the fruit of uncleanness and lawlessness, things of which we are now ashamed. The mature among us now even have a dread of them because we know **“the end of those things is death.”**

Free from sin, servile to God

- **But now having been made free from sin, and having become servile to God, ye have your fruit for sanctification, and the end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 6:22-23).

When we repent and turn away from sin we become free from it. However, that process is not always easy. For a man can become so addicted to sin that he must struggle mightily to overcome it. Drunkards are a classic example. People also become addicted to narcotics, to smoking, to gambling, to various forms of sexual behavior, and many other things. Indeed, a man can become addicted to virtually any sin. There are even men who have become addicted to things that cause them pain. Remember those things when you are tempted to sin.

But when a man genuinely turns to the Lord, he will repent and forsake his sins, regardless of how much of a sacrifice he must make. Not only must we become free from sin by repenting, but we must also become servile to God. It is not enough just to forsake sin.

Remember what Jesus said about a cleansed house that remained empty: **“But when the unclean spirit goes forth out of the man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and finds it not. Then it says, I will return into my house from where I came out. And when it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So it will also be to this evil generation”** (Matthew 12:43-45). Unless a man becomes servile to God, bearing fruit for righteousness, he will eventually regress and become even more sinful.

In contrast, when we become servile to God, we have our fruit for sanctification. Our fruit will be deeds of righteousness. And that sanctifies us, making us worthy of eternal life. For the book of Revelation says, **“And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, says the**

Spirit, so that they may rest from their toils, and their works follow with them” (Revelation 14:13).

Our works follow us because we will be judged by them, as Revelation also says: **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:12).

Paul said the wages of sin is death. There are consequences to everything we do, whether it be a sin or an act of righteousness. Those consequences can be immediate or they can be delayed. Sometimes the delays can be for years. Nevertheless, there are consequences to everything we do. And when Paul said that the wages of sin is death, he was speaking about the consequence of sin. And just as with the sin of Adam the consequence of sin for us is death.

However, our eternal spirit can live by receiving the gift of God, which is only in Christ Jesus our Lord. As Peter said to the Jews, **“And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). And that salvation is a gift of God, because no man is able to earn it.

Dominion of the law

- **Or are ye ignorant, brothers (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law has dominion over the man for as long a time as he lives? (Romans 7:1).**

Every nation has laws. And every citizen of a nation is subject to the laws of it, and he is subject to those laws as long as he lives in that nation. That was also true of the nation of Israel with its law of Moses. As long as the leaders of Israel rejected Christ and kept the law of Moses, the Jews in Israel were under the dominion of that law. And that included Jews who were Christians.

That is why the elders of the church at Jerusalem said to Paul after he came there, **“Thou see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed, and they are all zealots of the law”** (Acts 21:20). They were zealots of the law because they were good citizens of Israel. Nevertheless, after the Jews continued to reject Christ, God sent the Roman army to destroy the temple and their nation so they could never again be under the dominion of the law of Moses.

An example of marriage

- **For the woman under authority to the living husband has been bound by law, but if the husband should die, she has been released from the law of the husband. So then, of the living husband, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes to another man, but if the husband should die, she is free from the law, for her not to be an adulteress having become to another man (Romans 7:2-3).**

Paul now uses the example of a husband and his wife. The law required a woman to be under the authority of her husband as long as he lived. However, if her husband died, she was released from the law of the husband. If a woman became to another man while her husband was alive, she would have been called an adulteress. However, if her husband died, she would not have been an adulteress when she became to another man.

In the same way, men were originally bound to the legal system of God's spiritual laws of righteousness, whether stated in the law of Moses for the Israelites, or in any other form, including the law written in our hearts. However, when we become disciples of Christ we are freed from that legal system with God. Instead, we become subject to Christ's law of liberty.

That means we are no longer bound by a legal system with God. Our commitment is now based upon our desire to do any kind of righteousness, not simply keeping a set of laws. Our commitment is to be guided by his Spirit to promote his truth and righteousness. And that frees us from a legal system with him.

Regarding the matter of a woman being under the authority of her husband, the wicked rulers of this adulterous generation of Americans have abolished that law for our land. A woman is no longer required to be under the authority of her husband. She is given equal rights with him in all things. Indeed, in many ways she has greater authority than her husband, because our wicked rulers give her greater authority over their children. Hence, half of the marriages in America fail; almost half of the children are bastards; lawlessness gangs of young men plague our cities; and the country is being filled with sex perverts of all kinds. And many sinners love to have it that way.

Dead to the law

- **Therefore, my brothers, ye also became dead to the law through the body of Christ in order for ye to become to another, to him who was raised from the dead, so that we would bear fruit to God (Romans 7:4).**

As disciples of Christ, we became dead to a legal system with God through the body of Christ. For when he became our Redeemer, through the sacrifice of his body of flesh, that freed us from our commitment to God's legal system for mankind. We became dead to that law, not to become lawless, but to become to another; namely, to Christ, who was raised from the dead never to die again, so that we would bear fruit to God.

We now belong to Christ and his law of liberty. And in that way we can bear fruit mightily to God, freed from bondage to a legal system. For every legal system restricts the actions of men. Sinners need such restrictions. However, laws hamper righteous men in their efforts to bear fruit to God, because laws are rigid and blind.

Remember this story about Jesus and the law of the sabbath: **"At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath, and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears, and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, Behold, thy disciples do what is not permitted to do upon the sabbath.**

"But he said to them, Have ye not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him, how he entered into the house of God, and ate the loaves of the pre-

sentation, which was not permitted for him to eat, nor for those with him, except only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? But I say to you, that a greater than the temple is here.

“But if ye had known what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath” (Matthew 12:1-8).

Legal systems do not promote righteousness, all they do is help righteous rulers combat sinfulness. As Paul said to Timothy, **“But we know that the law is good, if any man uses it lawfully, knowing this, that law is not laid down for righteous men, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the irreverent and sinful, for the impious and profane, for father killers and mother killers, for man killers, for fornicators, for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing contrary to the sound doctrine according to the good news of the glory of the blessed God, of which I was entrusted”** (First Timothy 1:8-11).

Serving in newness of spirit

- **For when we were in the flesh, the passions of the sins were working in our body-parts (through the law) in order to bear fruit to death. But now we have been released from the law, having died to what we were held, so as for us to serve in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of a document** (Romans 7:5-6).

Being in the flesh means living a worldly life, one that is independent of the will of God. And the passions of the sins—the lusts of our flesh—had been working in our body-parts (through our knowledge of evil) to bear fruit to death. Bearing fruit to death means producing sin (which consequences always eventually lead to harm and destruction), and living a life that condemns us to death, the second death of existence in hell.

But as disciples of Christ we have been released from a legal system with God. Through our death in the watery grave of immersion, we have died to that legal system to which we were held. So that now we serve in newness of spirit, not in oldness of a document. The old covenant was for God to make his people a royal priesthood and a holy nation if they would obey his commands that were recorded in the law of Moses. That was the agreement, the covenant.

God’s new covenant says that he will make us a royal priesthood and a holy nation if we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ and his good news. That holy nation is the kingdom of God, the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not based upon statutes and ordinances recorded in any document. It is based upon our faith and love for Christ. It is based upon our love for him, and upon applying the principles of his righteousness to our lives.

Nevertheless, we are still committed to obey the commands of Christ. For Jesus said, **“If ye keep my commandments, ye will dwell in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and dwell in his love”** (John 15:10). And those commandment are found in the teachings of the New Testament scriptures.

Sin and knowledge

- **What will we say then? The law is sin? May it not happen! Yet I did not know sin except through law. For likewise I would not have known lust, if the law did not say, Thou shall not covet. But sin, having taken opportunity through the commandment, wrought in me every evil desire, for apart from law sin is dead.**
- **And I was alive once apart from law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And I found to me, the commandment being for life, this is for death. For sin, having taken opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.**
- **So the law is indeed holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Has therefore what is good become death to me? May it not happen! Instead, it is sin, so that it might be revealed, sin working death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin might become sinful to extreme (Romans 7:7-13).**

Substituting the words “knowledge of good and evil” for the words law and commandment in that passage, it would read this way:

What will we say then? The knowledge of good and evil is sin? May it not happen! Yet I did not know sin except through knowledge of good and evil. For likewise I would not have known lust, if the knowledge of good and evil did not say, Thou shall not covet. But sin, having taken opportunity through the knowledge of good and evil, wrought in me every evil desire, for apart from knowledge of good and evil sin is dead.

And I was alive once apart from knowledge of good and evil, but when the knowledge of good and evil came, sin revived, and I died. And I found to me, the knowledge of good and evil being for life, this is for death. For sin, having taken opportunity through the knowledge of good and evil, deceived me, and by it killed me.

So the knowledge of good and evil is indeed holy ... and righteous and good. Has therefore what is good become death to me? May it not happen! Instead, it is sin, so that it might be revealed, sin working death in me through what is good, so that through the knowledge of good and evil sin might become sinful to extreme.

Paul said that law (knowledge of good and evil) is “what is good.” Therefore, having that knowledge does not condemn us. We become condemned when we use it to sin. Sin deceives us, and by using our knowledge of good and evil, it kills us. It kills us by deceiving us and making us guilty, just as it did with Adam. And the spirit of every man is deceived and condemned that way during the weakness of his youth.

One purpose of God allowing sin to become sinful to extreme was to demonstrate how evil sin is. For anyone with eyes to see knows how much evil is in this troubled world. And every bit of it is caused by sin against God. Another purpose of sin becoming sinful to extreme was to defeat God’s enemies. For living in this world of sinfulness to extreme proves that no mere man can live without sin to avoid condemnation. Hence, we all sin

and need to be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Those who love and obey him receive the gift of salvation from him, but God's incorrigible enemies refuse, and so they receive just condemnation. Unrepentant sinners will bear the full punishment of their rebellion against God.

Sold under sin

- **For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, having been sold under sin** (Romans 7:14).

Things spiritual are those things about God and his will for our souls. The law is spiritual because it involves those things. Our flesh is carnal. And it has been sold under sin because we all sin. We sell ourselves under sin when we first sin. And as with a woman and her virginity, once she violates it she can never get it back. Once we sin our flesh remains sold under sin. And having been sold under sin means we cannot live a perfect life. Of all men only Jesus Christ the Son of God never sold himself under sin. Paul next explains what it means to be sold under sin.

Doing what we hate

- **For I do not understand what I do, for I do not do this that I want, but what I hate, this I do. But if I do this that I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. But now I no longer perform it, but the sin dwelling in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh, for to will is present in me, but to do the good, I find not. For I do not do good that I want, instead, wrong that I do not want, this I do. But if I do this that I do not want, I no longer perform it, but sin dwelling in me** (Romans 7:15-19).

Sin is doing things wrong. In the above passage Paul was not speaking about willful sins against God's commandments. He was referring to the constant things we do wrong that we try to avoid. I sometimes cut my finger. I sometimes bump into someone. I sometimes drop something accidentally. I sometimes forget to do something I said I would. Those are just a few of the things Paul meant by doing the wrong he did not want. They even include things we do accidentally that cause great harm or even death. Such things are all so common among men that we think they are natural to us. They are only natural because all men sell themselves under sin and become captive in the law of sin.

Sin dwelling in us

- **But if I do this that I do not want, I no longer perform it, but sin dwelling in me** (Romans 7:20).

When Paul says he does not perform what he does, that sounds contradictory. What he means is that when his body does foolish things against his will, then his spirit is not doing it. It is sin dwelling in his flesh. All of us do foolish things against our will. It is because we have sold ourselves under sin. And selling ourselves under sin means we become captive in the law of sin.

Captive in the law of sin

- **Consequently I find the law in my wanting to do good, that evil is present in me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body-parts, warring against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my body-parts (Romans 7:21-23).**

Because of the sin of Adam we are all now born with the knowledge of good and evil, that intuitive sense of right and wrong we inherit from him. And our premature knowledge of evil means that foolishness is a natural part our childish minds. Remember what Solomon said about the mind of a child: **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child ...”** (Proverbs 22:15). And every man who wants to be righteous must struggle against that foolishness we are born with, that premature ability to commit evil. Even Jesus was born with it, but he never allowed it to cause him to sin. Remember, it is not wrong to have knowledge of evil.

We are also born with a law of sin within our bodies. There is much mystery about it, but apparently when Adam sinned by eating the fruit of that tree prematurely it also created a law of sin in his body-parts. And since he was the prototype man, that law of sin is transmitted genetically to all of us.

That law of sin is apparently what makes our flesh hostile to the purity of our spirit (our inner man). That law of sin does things like corrupt the normal appetites of our body into lusts, which urge us to indulge our appetites indiscriminately. And so both Peter and Paul warned about how our flesh is against our spirit. Peter said, **“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”** (First Peter 2:11). And Paul said, **“But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:16-17).

That is what Paul meant by a different law in his body-parts that was warring against the law of his mind (the free will of his spirit). The mind of Paul had chosen to live by the righteousness of the Spirit of God, but like the ever present force of gravity his flesh kept trying to drag him down into sin.

Even Jesus was born that way. He too had to struggle against the law of sin in his flesh, but he never became captive to it. For Paul told how God sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin to condemn sin. Jesus never sold himself under sin, because he never sinned. Consequently, he never became captive to the law of sin the way we all do.

That is why this passage that Satan quoted to Jesus is literally true: **“If thou are the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He will command his agents about thee, and, They will take thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone”** (Matthew 4:6).

God did not allow Jesus to even dash his foot against a stone, because he never sinned and became captive in the law of sin. Hence, he lived infallibly. That is why he could contrast himself with us, when he said to his disciples such things as, **“If ye therefore, being evil,**

know to give good gifts to your children, how much more your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

God did not protect Jesus from such accidental things simply because he was the Son of God. That would have defeated the goal of his Son living a fully human life. We all corrupt our spirits by sinning, but Jesus never did. He never became captive in the law of sin. That was why he was able to live an infallible life, proving his moral and spiritual superiority and his worthiness to reign supreme.

Jesus rescued us from death

- **I am a wretched man. Who will rescue me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord** (Romans 7:24-25).

When Paul said he was a wretched man, he was speaking about his corrupted body of flesh that was captive in the law of sin. And since the wages of sin is death, Paul sought to be rescued from his corrupted body. And since God had sent Jesus to qualify himself to rescue us, to earn the right to redeem us from the condemnation of death (the second death of hell), Paul thanked God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

No longer condemned

- **So then, I of myself in the mind indeed serve a law of God, but in the flesh a law of sin. Consequently nothing is condemnation now to those in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and of death** (Romans 7:25-8:2).

What Paul said about serving both a law of God and a law of sin is true of every man who believes in Christ. We serve a law of God with our mind, with the free will of our divine spirit. But we also serve a law of sin with our corrupted body of flesh. We serve it because we sold ourselves under sin becoming captive in the law of sin.

Nevertheless, we are not under condemnation when we walk according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh. We are not condemned when we willfully choose to live for righteousness and against sin. We are not condemned because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed us from the law of sin and of death. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the doctrine of his good news of our salvation. And our obedience to that doctrine, that way of walking, that Way of life, frees our eternal spirit from the law of sin and death. Our body of flesh is condemned to die, but our spirit will live forever with God in heaven through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus condemned sin in the flesh

- **For the impotence of the law, in that it was weak because of the flesh, God, having sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the justice of the law might be fulfilled in**

us, those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3-4).

Paul said the law was **“holy and righteous and good”** (Romans 7:12). However, it was weak and impotent because of our flesh. The law could not make us righteous before God, because our flesh kept us from keeping it fully. And that condemned us. Remember, a single violation makes us guilty, and guilt brings condemnation.

However, God sent his own Son in a body of flesh, even a normal body of sin. He sent him to condemn sin in the flesh. The enemies of God could argue that it is natural and inevitable for us to sin; therefore, we do not deserve being punished for it. But Jesus proved them wrong. He proved that sin is not inevitable, and therefore deserves being condemned.

And no man can excuse himself by saying that the Son of God never experienced having to living in this world. For he faced every kind of trial and temptation as we have, but without sinning. He rebuffed every temptation the devil could bring against him.

Therefore, Jesus proved that the requirement of law to punish the guilty was just. Jesus also proved his right to redeem us from the condemnation caused by our sins. For he paid the price with his blood. Since he obeyed God in every way, even to the point of a cruel death upon the cross, the justice of law required him to be recompensed. And part of his recompense was the right to redeem all who belong to him. We have been **“bought with a price”** (First Corinthians 6:20). Through Christ the justice of the law was fulfilled in us. It was just for God to pay him, part of which payment he used to save the souls of all who belong to him from condemnation.

Jesus did not redeem all mankind. He redeemed all who belong to him: **“those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”** That means we must sacrifice our worldly lives of sin, and live righteously. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“And he who does not take his cross and follow behind me, is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it”** (Matthew 10:38-39).

Flesh versus Spirit

- **For those who are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mentality of the flesh is death, but the mentality of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mentality of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in flesh cannot please God** (Romans 8:5-8).

In the Bible use of the word flesh goes beyond just a man's body. It often refers to everything about a man's material self. For example, when Paul was defending himself to his brothers at Corinth, he said, **“Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast”** (Second Corinthians 11:18). He then went on to speak of things like his ancestry, his service to Christ, and his many hardships and persecutions.

Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about the world: **“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world (instead I chose you out**

of the world), because of this the world hates you” (John 15:19). James also said, **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is hatred of God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”** (James 4:4). And John said, **“Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (First John 2:15). Those are just a few passages to show how the world is against God.

Being according to the flesh means living a worldly life, while being according to the Spirit means living a life of righteousness for God. Therefore, substituting the word “world” for flesh, and adding “God” to the word Spirit, the above passage in Romans would read this way:

For those who are according to the world think about the things of the world, but those according to the Spirit of God the things of the Spirit of God. For the mentality of the world is death, but the mentality of the Spirit of God is life and peace. Because the mentality of the world is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in the world cannot please God.

The mentality of the world is death because it is the way of sin. And sin is the cause of all sorrow, destruction, and death. Remember what Paul said about the wages of sin: **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 6:23)

In contrast, the mentality of the Spirit of God is life and peace. For the ways of God are productive, unifying, and elevating. Remember what Solomon said about nations: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). Moreover, it brings true joy and happiness, the inner joy and happiness of our spirits.

Those who are in flesh cannot please God, because living according to the world makes a man an enemy of God. No man can love both God and the ways of world. Therefore, those who are in flesh, who live a worldly life, cannot please God. They cannot please him because they are sinning against him.

That mentality is not submissive to the law of God. Indeed, it is not able to be submissive to his law because it is committed to things of disobedience. The ways of the flesh, the ways of the world, are diametrically opposed to the ways of the Spirit of God. Therefore, we cannot trust the ways of our flesh; we cannot put our hope in our flesh. We must elevate our minds above our flesh to the ways of the Spirit of God if we want to please him. Remember what James said, **“Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”**

In the Spirit

- **But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him.**
- **And if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up the Christ from the dead will**

also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you
(Romans 8:9-11).

The word spirit refers to the animating force or energy of our lives, although in a broad sense it refers to any kind of energy. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. Each man has an earthly spirit which perishes when we die. But we also have a divine spirit that never perishes. And both of those spirits inhabit our bodies.

Moreover, other spirits (kinds of energy) can also inhabit our bodies. The Bible speaks of men that have been overcome by evil spirits within them. Even the spirit of Satan can enter into a man. For example, the book of Luke says, **“And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve”** (Luke 22:3). The Spirit of God and of Christ can also enter into our bodies.

We who believe in Christ live not in the flesh, not by the ways of the world, but in the Spirit. Which means the Spirit of God dwells in us. His energy helps guide us in our motives and in our knowledge of his will (but not in any kind of supernatural way).

Paul also said that if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ he is not of him, he does not belong to him. We must have his animating force within us to belong to him. And even though our body is dead because of sin (meaning condemn to die), if Christ is in us, the spirit is life because of righteousness. That means when we use our spirit to live righteously, then our spirit is life not death. The spirit of those who live in sin is death, because they will suffer the second death of hell.

Just as the Spirit of God raised up Jesus from the dead, so also he will also give life to us through his Spirit that dwells in us. Paul said he would give life to our mortal bodies. That does not mean he will resurrect our mortal bodies the way he did the body of Jesus. For when Paul was speaking of our resurrection, he said, **“And just as we have worn the form of the earthly, we will also wear the form of the heavenly. Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:49-50).

When Paul said that God would give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit in us, he was referring to its energizing force that promotes our righteousness. Thus, having the gift of eternal life even effects the life of our bodies. It enlivens them to live righteously. It does that through our knowledge of the word of God and our enhanced conscience, not by any kind of supernatural intervention.

On the other hand, sin makes our bodies dead (in sin) even while we are alive. Therefore, unrepentant sinners are dead even though they are alive. For example, when Paul was speaking about widows, he said, **“But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives”** (First Timothy 5:6). They are dead in the sense of being in a condition of death, meaning their bodies are animated but their eternal spirits are doomed to the second death of hell (see Revelation 21:8).

Killing the deeds of the body

- **So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to flesh. For if ye live according to flesh, ye are going to die, but if in spirit ye kill the deeds of the body, ye will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God** (Romans 8:12-14).

Sinners consider themselves obligated to live according to the lusts of their flesh and other ways of the world. And they think anybody doing otherwise is crazy, not realizing those things are the ways of death. As Peter said, **“For enough time of life has past for you to accomplish the will of the Gentiles, having gone in debaucheries, lusts, excesses of wine, revelings, drinking parties, and lawless idolatries. During which they think it strange of you not running together into the same pouring out of debauchery, while they slander. Men who will give back an accounting to him who fares readily to judge the living and the dead”** (First Peter 4:3-5).

Our true obligations are to the Lord Jesus Christ, because he sacrificed himself to redeem us from condemnation. And if we too sacrifice ourselves by killing the deeds of the body, then he will redeem us for eternal life. God will adopt us to be his sons for eternity when we are led by his Spirit. When we willfully choose to live for his truth and righteousness we become his children. And there can be no other blessing that is greater.

Receiving a spirit of adoption

- **For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God** (Romans 8:15-16).

Although Paul called us bondmen of God, our bond service is nothing like that of other bondmen. For we have **“received a spirit of adoption.”** We can cry out **“Abba, Father”** when we speak to God. The word abba also means father, but it also includes connotations of filial affection and respect. It is a more intimate word than father. Jesus used the two of them together when he prayed to God in the garden before his betrayal, saying, **“Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me, but not what I want, but what thou want”** (Mark 14:36).

Paul said the Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit, testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. Our spirit testifies or verifies that we are children of God by our lives of faith and righteousness. Our spirit energizes us to obey God and bear fruit for righteousness (but not in any kind of miraculous way). The Spirit of God also testifies or verifies that we are children of God. It bears witness that we are faithful and righteous. Thus, the Spirit of God joins together with our spirit to confirm that we are truly children of God. And that testimony is used to guarantee our eternal inheritance.

Joint-heirs with Christ

- **And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly** (Romans 8:17).

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God. Yet God has adopted us to also be his sons. Each of us will be a son of God in heaven. (Here upon the earth we are called children of God because he adopts both men and women. However, the female form is a temporary one for this life only. In heaven we will all be masculine, sons of God.)

And since we are God's children, then we are also his heirs. Indeed, we are joint-heirs with Christ. What a fabulous honor and blessing. Peter spoke of that when he was praising God: **"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot us again according to his abundant mercy for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for an inheritance imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heavens for you, men being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"** (First Peter 1:3-5).

The book of Revelation also speaks of our inheritance: **"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will not be any more death, nor grief, nor crying, nor will there be any more anguish, because the former things are gone."**

"And he who sits upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says to me, Write, because these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, I have become, I, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him who is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me" (Revelation 21:3-7).

However, that promise of our joint inheritance and glorification with Christ is contingent upon our suffering jointly with him. Although some suffering is a natural part of living in this sinful world, nevertheless we are blessed by God in that special way if we patiently endure whatever suffering is required to live righteously.

Peter also wrote of that, when he said, **"Beloved, ye should not be surprised at the fieriness in you, which occurs for a trial to you, like a strange thing happening to you. But rejoice in so far as ye are partakers in the sufferings of the Christ, so that also at the revealing of his glory ye may rejoice, having exceeding joy."**

"Blessed are ye if ye are reviled for the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. From them he is indeed blasphemed, but from you he is glorified. For let not any man of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a busybody. But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this regard" (First Peter 4:12-16)

Our sufferings are not comparable

- **For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us (Romans 8:17-18).**

I consider that to be one of the most beautiful and encouraging passages in the Bible. It is beautiful because it reveals to us how incomparable the glory will be in heaven for us.

Truly, this life is filled with sorrows and sufferings. Indeed, consider these words of Solomon: **“And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith”** (Ecclesiastes 1:13). And Jesus said to his apostles during the time of the last supper: **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

Just living in this world involves tribulation. Indeed, this life is a great tribulation compared with life in heaven. And for those of us who strive to live according to God’s truth and righteousness, that tribulation is greater. It is greater because we do not live according to the flesh as sinners do. They seek to maximize their pleasures and minimize their pains even if it means sinning.

But we live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit of God. That means we reject sinful pleasures and endure the pains of righteousness. Hence, Paul said these words: **“If we are men who have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men more miserable”** (First Corinthians 15:19). We would be more miserable because we would be forsaking the pleasures of a worldly life in vain—if there is no resurrection.

The last part of the book of Revelation describes a few things about the glory that is going to be revealed to us in heaven. This is what it says just before describing a little of the beauty of the new Jerusalem: **“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will not be any more death, nor grief, nor crying, nor will there be any more anguish, because the former things are gone” (Revelation 21:1-4). That is the great hope we have in Christ our Lord and Savior.

Moreover, I have no doubt our home in the new Jerusalem will be filled with the most marvelous blessings of high technology and other things for us to enjoy. For Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **“But as it is written, What an eye has not seen, and an ear has not heard, and have not arisen in a heart of a man, are things that God prepared for those who love him”** (First Corinthians 2:9). Our blessings there will be so great it is impossible for us to even imagine them. Only those who are deceived by the devil think all we will do in heaven is sit on the grass and sing praises to God.

The creation made subject to futility

- **For the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope** (Romans 8:19-20).

Why is this world a great tribulation? God made it that way; he made it “**subject to futility.**” And being subject to futility means the world is slowly decaying. Scientists call that process the second law of thermodynamics. One of them coined a word called entropy, which means a measure of disorder in the universe. And the second law of thermodynamics says entropy continually increases. In other words, the universe is continually becoming more disordered. And Paul said that God made it that way.

In our everyday life we cannot see the increasing entropy of the universe, but we do see death and decay everywhere. Those things are inevitable characteristics of our world because God made it “**subject to futility.**”

In contrast to popular belief, the world’s subjection to futility was not the result of the sin of Adam, because he originally lived in the garden of Eden where the tree of life was. The tree of life was not available to the world. Remember what the scripture says about the tree of life after Adam was driven out of the garden of Eden: “**So he drove out the man. And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life**” (Genesis 3:24).

Those who claim this is a fallen world caused by the sin of Adam quote this passage to justify their belief: “**And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day**” (Genesis 1:31). What God meant by the Creation being “very good” was that it was very good for the purposes he created it, not that it was a perfect world.

For notice how the passage in Romans says “**the creation was made subject to futility ... because of him who subjected it in hope.**” God made the creation subject to futility so that we could have hope, the hope or opportunity to live in heaven as his sons for eternity. For this world is a place of testing, to see who is worthy to become his eternal sons in the better world of heaven. Therefore, “**the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.**”

And our manifestation will be at the end of the world. For “**the expectation of the creation**” means the goal of the creation is our becoming sons of God. This creation was made as a place where we can qualify to become sons of God. Therefore it was subject to futility so that we could have that great hope. Remember what Paul said about how tribulations give us hope: “**... we also take pride in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope**” (Romans 5:3-4).

That is why Paul said that “**the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope.**” Our world was subjected to futility in hope, meaning our hope to become sons of God in a better world. And through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have that hope of a better world. Therefore, be wise and seek for that better world so that you can become a son of God for eternity.

Freed from the bondage of corruption

- **Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now** (Romans 8:21-22).

When Peter was speaking about the end of the world, he said, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, during which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, being intensely hot, will be disintegrated, and the earth and the works in it will be destroyed by fire”** (Second Peter 3:10).

However, what Paul said indicates the elements will not simply be destroyed by fire but will be transformed, freed from the bondage of corruption. All of the substance of the world will not be wasted. It will simply be changed to a much better substance, one that is free from bondage to corruption.

Paul also said it would be freed **“into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”** Our world is under the control of many natural laws. However, what Paul said suggests the new substance will have liberty from such control. Part of the good news of Christ is that God has freed us from a legal system of control like that of the law of Moses. We are under a law of liberty.

That means as long as we live righteously we are free to choose how. An example of that is from one of the parables of Jesus. It begins this way: **“A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And having called ten of his bondmen, he gave them ten minas and said to them, Do business until I come”** (Luke 19:12-13). The nobleman did not tell those bondmen how to do business. They were free to decide for themselves. They were free to use what he gave them as long as they worked righteously. And that is like our law of liberty with God. We are not bound by a lot of statutes and ordinances with him.

And what Paul said about the creation being freed into the liberty of the glory of the children of God indicates it too will be freed from bondage to a lot of laws. Consider some examples of being freed from the control of natural law. Remember this passage about Jesus: **“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking upon the sea”** (Matthew 14:25). Jesus was not bound by the laws of water, which otherwise would not have supported him. He was at liberty to use the elements of the world as he chose, freed from its laws.

Another example is when the heavenly agent came to free Peter from prison. The record says, **“And when they passed a first and a second watch, they came to the iron gate, the one leading to the city, which opened spontaneously to them”** (Acts 12:10). The gate opened spontaneously to them because the agent was not bound by the laws of physics.

And in the same way the new creation will not be bound by natural laws. Apparently our creation will be transformed to a substance (of a new heaven and earth) that will be completely flexible in its use, not bound by natural laws. And how that substance is used will be determined by us in heaven.

Regarding the groaning and travailing of our world, perhaps the most visible example of that groaning and travailing is the weather. But that is merely one example. For this is a world filled with struggle and conflict, from the basic elements to the celestial bodies of the heavens. And all the creatures of the earth groan and travail together. Nothing is exempt.

People do not want to think of their world as a place of groaning and travailing. Therefore, they close their minds to that idea whenever they can. But all a man needs is to take off his blinders and rose colored glasses and look to see it. I marvel at city dwellers when they visit wilderness areas. They stand in awe of the natural beauty they see, they but seem blinded to all the death and destruction that is there with it.

For example, every forest indeed contains many things that are beautiful. But every forest floor is also covered with the dead carcasses of vegetation: seeds, leaves, twigs and branches. And just try living in wilderness areas—places untouched by civilization—and you will suffer much groaning and travailing just to survive.

Waiting for adoption

- **And not only so, but also ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit. And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved to hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. For what is seen, why also hope for that? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait through patience (Romans 8:23-25).**

That reference to the first fruit of the Spirit is only found in that one passage of the Bible, and its meaning is not clear. It apparently refers to our promised resurrection from the dead. And only the Spirit of God makes that possible.

Several passages in the Bible refer to the disciples of Christ as being first fruit. One example is from the book of James: **“Having deliberated, he begot us by the word of truth for us to be a certain first fruit of his creatures”** (James 1:18). However, Christ is also referred as a first fruit. For when Paul was speaking about our resurrection, he said, **“But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruit of those who are asleep”** (First Corinthians 15:20).

Fruit contains the seed of new life. And the redemption of our body refers to our new life in heaven. Our body of flesh is not redeemed from death. It is our eternal spirit that is redeemed for a new body with a new life. And our salvation includes that hope. Our salvation is not just being redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. Our salvation includes the hope of adoption by God to be his sons for eternity.

While we are in this body of flesh we groan, enduring the trials and tribulations of this world that is groaning and travailing in the bondage of corruption. But our salvation includes our hope of a better world. And as Paul said, we wait through patience. Just as God is longsuffering with the sins of this world, so we too must be longsuffering, joining with him to oppose the sins of the world.

However, as Paul said, our eternal adoption and the redemption of our body is only a hope while we remain in this life. If we could see those things, then it would not be hope. Nev-

ertheless, even though we cannot see them with our eyes, we believe in them. We trust God and his promises. Therefore, we wait through patience as we continue to live faithfully and fruitfully for him.

The Spirit helps us

- **And likewise also the Spirit helps our weaknesses, for we know not what we would pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mentality of the Spirit, because it appeals to God for the sanctified** (Romans 8:26-27).

God's Holy Spirit resides in every disciple of Christ. And his Spirit helps us to live righteously (but not in miraculous ways). Part of that help is our knowledge of the word of God, because the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Part of that help is also within our conscience by affecting our feelings and emotions, encouraging us to reject sin and live righteously.

Paul even said the Holy Spirit helps us with our prayers. In our human frailty we are severely limited in how we speak to God. Hence, the Spirit intercedes for us, enabling our prayers to be properly communicated. And the Spirit does it with **"inexpressible groanings."** The Holy Spirit groans because it is speaking for us. And remember what Paul said about our existence in this life: **"And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body"** (Romans 8:23).

Consider the pleadings of righteous fathers and mothers for their children when they are in need. They groan for them with strong emotions when they are pleading for help. And so it is with the Spirit of God when it intercedes with our prayers.

When Paul said those groanings were inexpressible, he could have been referring to the severity of them. He could also have been referring to our inability to comprehend heavenly expressions of emotions.

He who searches the hearts is Almighty God. He searches our hearts to know what kind of spirit we have. God gives us all a pure spirit when we are born. And since he also gives us free will, many souls corrupt their spirits into evil spirits. Therefore, God searches the hearts to know with kind of spirit we make of ourselves, and what kind of mind we have.

God is especially conscious of the mentality of the Spirit because the Spirit appeals to God for us. Remember what Jesus said about little children: **"See that ye not disparage one of these little ones, for I say to you, that in the heavens their agents do always behold the face of my Father in the heavens"** (Matthew 18:10). And since we who belong to Christ are children of God, then God is especially conscious of the mind of the Spirit appealing for us.

All things work for good

- **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose** (Romans 8:28).

That too is one of the most beautiful and encouraging passages in the Bible. However, it should not be misunderstood. It does not mean that all things work together to keep us from any suffering. What Paul means by good in that passage is the same as what God meant by the creation being very good (see Genesis 1:31). The “good” Paul refers to is our ultimate good, which means our eternal salvation in heaven. It means that even our suffering works for good—our ultimate good.

In my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World* I explain in detail how God designed and created our world to guarantee that all things would work together for good for those who love him. He foresaw everything that could possibly happen in the world, and he arranged the laws of nature to guarantee they would work for our good, our ultimate good. And he retained our ability of free will.

Paul also added the part about our being called according to purpose. We are called by God to believe and follow his Son Jesus Christ. And the purpose of our calling is to become his sons for eternity. This is a world of testing. God is choosing those who are worthy to be his eternal sons by what kind of spirits we make of ourselves. That is a major part of God’s purpose for our living in this world. And his purpose should be our purpose.

Predestined to be like his Son

- **Because whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be of similar nature of the form of his Son, in order for him to be the firstborn son among many brothers** (Romans 8:29).

Regarding predestination, there is much false teaching about it. The Roman Catholic Augustine and the Protestant John Calvin both taught that our eternal destiny has been fixed. They said that God has predetermined exactly who will be saved and who will be lost, even before we are born. That contradicts what the Bible teaches. They have completely misinterpreted what it says about predestination.

God predestined for salvation a *type* of men, not any specific men. He predestined every man who loves his truth and righteousness to be similar in nature of the form of his son. And that similarity of form is spiritual not physical. Remember what Jesus replied to Philip when he asked him to show the Father: **“Have I been so long a time with you, and thou do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. And how can thou say, Show us the Father? Do thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:9-10).

Seeing God the Father through Jesus is by knowing about his manner of life, the way he lived, not the form of his body. And that means everyone who learns about how Jesus lived has seen God the Father. They have seen his spirit, which is the most important part of anyone. They have seen his spirit in the eye of their mind. That is what Paul meant by our having a similar nature of the form of God’s. We have a spirit that is of a similar nature of the form of his Son.

And every man decides what kind of spirit he will make of himself. God does not predestine it. God indeed foreknew every kind of life we could live, but he does not determine which one we will live. He did not predestine our lives. He gave us free will so that we

ourselves could decide our lives; what kind of life it would be, good or evil, righteous or sinful.

Using myself as an example, I could have lived many different ways. I could have been a scoffer and an enemy of Christ instead of a believer and a disciple. I determined which I would be, and I will be judged by my choice. That freedom to decide what to believe and what kind of morality to have was given to every man, which is why every man will be judged.

God foreknew the different lives we could live. And with that foreknowledge, he predestined every man who loves his truth and righteousness to be of similar nature of the form of his Son. He predestined a type of man, every man who makes his spirit worthy to be a brother of his Son Jesus Christ. I explain in detail how God could foreknow events and predestine things, while still giving us free will, in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

God desires to have many sons in heaven with him. The purpose for the creation of this world was to provide a way for him to determine which souls would be worthy to become his sons for eternity. This world is a place of testing, the testing of our spirits. God created this world to give us the opportunity to make our spirits worthy of eternal sonship. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. He was begotten from God, both in heaven and on the earth. Every man is also born a son of God, although not like Christ. However, we lose our sonship when we first sin. Nevertheless, we can become sons of God again. Our way of becoming a son of God again is by believing and obeying his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus enables us to become sons of God by adoption, which only happens when we commit ourselves to him. And we become his sons for eternity when we remain faithful to the end. We are children of God in this world, but sons of God in heaven, because the female form is for this life only.

Called, made righteous, glorified

- **And whom he predestined, these he also called, and whom he called, these he also made righteous, and whom he made righteous, these he also glorified** (Romans 8:30).

God gave us the potential to live many different kinds of lives, both righteous and unrighteous. And he pre-determined what would be the outcome of every kind of life, predetermined even before the world began. Hence, he predestined every man who lives a righteous life. And through his Son Jesus Christ, God calls every such man to become his son for eternity. And every man called by him is made righteous through the redemption given to us by Christ. Jesus purified the soul of every man who belongs to him, consequently making us righteous. And every man made righteous is glorified by becoming one of God's sons for eternity.

Every man has the power to be a righteous man or an unrighteous man. And every man who chooses to be righteous is predestined by God, predestined for eternal salvation. And every such man is called by him to believe Jesus Christ. And every such called man is made righteous by believing and obeying our Lord Jesus. We are made righteous because

Jesus paid the debt of our sins. And thus being made righteous we are glorified by becoming a son of God for eternity.

I repeat those words of Paul because they give us such marvelous hope. We may groan and travail in this troubled world, but God has given us the hope of eternal life in a world free of groaning and travail. Even more he has given us the hope of becoming one of his sons for eternity with him in heaven. Never abandon that hope, because God always keeps his promises.

Who will accuse us?

- **What then will we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not even spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also give us all things with him? Who will accuse against the chosen of God? God is he who makes righteous. Who is he who will condemn? It is Christ who died, but more, who also was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also appeals for us** (Romans 8:31-34).

I continually marvel at the richness of truth and wisdom in the words of the Bible, the word of God. I have never seen another book like it, nowhere near like it. The above passage says so much in so few words. And that is typical of the word of God. Having become so familiar with the Bible, I am now virtually always disappointed at the wordiness and the shallowness of books written by men about religion and philosophy.

Paul asked who is against us. The world is filled with men who are attempting to be against us. They are attempting to be against us because they serve the devil. Remember what Paul said about that: **“Even you, who were dead in trespasses and sins in which ye once walked according to the era of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:1-2).

The devil is the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. And remember what John said about him: **“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night”** (Revelation 12:10).

Before our redemption by Christ, the devil could justifiably accuse us before God. He could justifiably accuse us because we were all guilty of sin. But now that Jesus has redeemed us, purified us, and made us righteous before God, then neither the devil nor anyone else can justifiably accuse us. That means nobody is against us in our relationship with God, regardless of how much they may try.

They cannot justifiably accuse us and condemn us, because God, through his Son Jesus Christ, made us righteous. They cannot condemn us because Christ lived a perfect life of obedience and then died for us. Consequently, he earned the right to redeem us. Even more, Jesus was resurrected to reign at the right hand of God in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 19:16). And it is he who appeals for us. He defends us from every accusation. Therefore Paul could say, **“If God is for us, who is against us?”** We are his chosen, made righteous by him. And he will **“give us all things with him.”**

Sheep of slaughter, but more than conquerors

- **Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or restriction, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, For thy sake we are killed the whole day long. We are considered as sheep of slaughter. But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us** (Romans 8:35-37).

In the world we are all vulnerable to separation from those who love us. Things like tribulations, restrictions, persecutions, famines, nakedness, perils, and weapons can separate us. And as humble disciples of Christ we are especially vulnerable. For his sake we of all men are attacked by all the world, whether the attacks be physical, legal, or mental. We are attacked because they hate us. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles: **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you”** (John 15:18).

The passage Paul quoted about being killed the whole day long is from this psalm: **“Yea, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”** (Psalm 44:22). Because we are humble and lowly souls, the aggressors of the world see us as weak and easy prey.

Remember how Jesus referred to us as his sheep: **“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine, and I am known by mine. Just as the Father knows me, I also know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring those also, and they will hear my voice. And there will become one flock, one shepherd”** (John 10:14-16). And after his resurrection, three times he told Peter to feed his sheep (see John 21:15-17).

Hence, the world sees us as sheep of slaughter. They even killed the Christ of God. Nevertheless, as Paul said, in spite of all those attacks against us, **“we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** Just before Jesus was betrayed and crucified, he said to his apostles, **“In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). He overcame the world by his righteous life.

And as the apostle John said, we too can overcome the world: **“Because everything that has been begotten from God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. And who is he who overcomes the world, if not he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** (First John 5:4-5). Our faith overcomes the world by enabling us to have the final victory. And that victory is our eternal salvation in heaven. Therefore, we are more than conquerors. We not only overcome the world, but we become sons of God for eternity with him in heaven.

Nothing can separate us from his love

- **For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor agents, nor principal positions, nor powers, nor things that have come, nor things that are coming, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 8:38-39).

When Paul said that he was persuaded, he was speaking from his faith. Because he trusted God and his promises; he was persuaded that nothing would be able to separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul named these specific kinds of things that would not be able to separate us: (1) death and life, (2) agents (of heaven), principle positions, and powers, (3) things that have come or are coming, and (4) height and depth. Then he added "any other creation," which includes everything else.

The things Paul listed are the extremes. Death and life are the end and the beginning. Agents, principle positions, and powers all refer to souls that have the greatest strength and authority. Things that have come or are coming covers the entire span of time. Height and depth are the extremes of space. Those examples Paul gave assure us that absolutely nothing can separate us from our relationship with God. Remember that when you suffer from the trials and tribulations of this life. Only continual unfaithfulness can separate us from God's love. Therefore, guard your faith with your life, because it is the foundation of your life.

Paul grieves about the Israelites

- **I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience testifying to me in the Holy Spirit, that great distress is in me, and unceasing sorrow in my heart.**
- **For I could wish I myself to be accursed from the Christ, for my brothers, my kinsmen according to flesh, who are Israelites, of whom is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the lawgiving, and the divine service, and the promises, of whom are the fathers, and from whom (according to flesh) is the Christ, God who is over all is blessed into the ages. Truly** (Romans 9:1-5).

That passage reveals the depth of love that Paul had for his countrymen, the Israelites. Because of them he had great distress and unceasing sorrow in his heart. He was greatly troubled about them because they had been God's chosen people, but now they have a (continuing) curse of God against them because they forsook his Son, their Messiah, and even crucified him. Paul said he could even wish for himself to be accursed from the Christ for their sake. He could wish that—if it would mean their repentance and salvation.

The Jews were Paul's most vicious enemies, responsible for most of the persecution he endured. That is probably why Paul emphasized the truth and sincerity of what he was saying. He assured the readers of that by saying he was not lying, and that his conscience was testifying inside of himself in the Holy Spirit. One of the ways the Holy Spirit helps us to do right is in our conscience. And Paul's conscience was telling him that he was sincere in what he said about being himself accursed from Christ.

Moses said something similar to that about his fellow Israelites. He spoke that way after the people had made a golden calf to worship. The record says, **"And Moses returned to Jehovah, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made gods of gold for them. Yet now, if thou will forgive their sin—, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou have written. And Jehovah said to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"** (Exodus 32:31-33).

Moses spoke that way in a very desperate moment. He was exasperated and frustrated by what the people had done. And that must have depressed his spirit causing him to say what he did. Actually, the people were continuously rebellious against both Moses and Jehovah. Here is a later passage that reveals how much of a burden they were to Moses. He said to Jehovah, **“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness”** (Numbers 11:14-15). Nevertheless, he still loved them and always pleaded to the Lord for their sakes, including whenever they rebelled.

Paul too was greatly troubled by his fellow countrymen. Nevertheless, he still loved them enough to consider being accursed from the Christ for their sakes. He loved them because of their great heritage, the details of which he listed. He said of the Israelites they were (1) the adoption, (2) the glory, (3) the covenants, (4) the lawgiving, (5) the divine service, (6) the promises, and (7) the fathers. And from them (according to flesh) is the Christ.

Of the Israelites was the adoption because God had chosen their race to be his special people, and because of them we can be adopted to be God’s new chosen people. Of them is the glory because they had become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and through them we can now become the priests of God. Of them is the covenants because God made both his old and his new covenants with them. Of them is the lawgiving because of the great law of Moses, the most superior legal system the world has ever known.

Of them is the divine service, because the proper ways to worship God came through them. Of them are the promises, because all the hope we have for God’s blessings in this life and in the one to come came through them. Of them are the fathers, the great spiritual patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) from whom came their nation, from which came the Christ and God’s holy word. And God is the source of all those blessings. Therefore, he is **“over all and blessed into the ages. Truly.”**

What Paul meant when he said he could wish himself accursed from the Christ for his fellow Israelites, was that he was willing to lose his soul’s salvation if it meant their salvation. It was an idle wish to show how deep was his love for them. It was an idle wish because he said **“I could wish.”**

Moreover, Paul knew that wish was impossible. For he was no doubt aware of this scripture: **“And Moses returned to Jehovah, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made gods of gold for them. Yet now, if thou will forgive their sin—, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou have written. And Jehovah said to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book”** (Exodus 32:1-33).

Jesus did become a curse for us: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is every man who hangs on a tree”** (Galatians 3:13). But that was only a curse against his body. It was not a curse against his eternal spirit.

Children of flesh are not children of God

- **But it is not as that the word of God has failed. For all those from Israel, these are not Israel, nor, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children, rather, In Isaac a seed will be called for thee. That is, the children of the flesh, these are not children of God, instead, the children of the promise are reckoned for seed (Romans 9:6-8).**

The nation of Israel failed to be worthy of remaining God's chosen people, but the word of God did not fail. God made several covenants with their founding father Abraham, which included promises to him. Here is the first covenant Jehovah made with him: **"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and be thou a blessing. And I will bless those who bless thee, and he who curses thee I will curse. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed"** (Genesis 12:1-3).

And here is what the record says when God gave him the covenant of circumcision: **"And when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face.**

"And God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shall be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, for I have made thee the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful.

"And I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:1-7).

Although Abraham's seed of the flesh, the children of Israel, failed to remain worthy, his seed of the promise have been worthy. The seed of the promise are those who have the faith of Abraham; namely, all who believe in the Son of God. Hence, Paul is saying that Abraham's offspring of his flesh are not considered his true children. Therefore, not all Israelites are true Israelites.

Remember what Jesus said when he first saw Nathanael: **"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit"** (John 1:47). And consider one of the things that Jesus said about the congregation in Philadelphia when he appeared to John from heaven: **"Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, those who say themselves to be Jews, and are not, but lie, behold, I will make them so that they will come and bow down before thy feet, and may know that I have loved thee"** (Revelation 3:9). Those enemies of Christ may have been Jews in the flesh, but not in the spirit. Hence, they were not genuine.

The word of promise

- **For this is the word of promise: At this time I will come, and there will be a son by Sarah. And not only so, but also Rebecca having bed from one man, our father Isaac (for not yet having been born, nor having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not from works, but from him who calls), it was said to her, The older will serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I regarded inferior (Romans 9:9-13).**

Paul here explains God's promise to Abraham about his seed. For many years Jehovah had promised a son to Abraham by his wife Sarah, yet they kept getting older without a son. Here is what the record says happened after Jehovah and two of his agents came and visited Abraham: **"And they said to him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return to thee when the season comes round, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him.**

"Now Abraham and Sarah were old, and well stricken in age. It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I have become old shall I have pleasure, my lord also being old? And Jehovah said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I who am old certainly bear a child? Is anything too hard for Jehovah? At the set time I will return to thee, when the season comes round, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:9-14).

Isaac was that seed of promise, and Rebecca was his wife. For many years she too was barren. However, after Isaac prayed to God for her she bore twin sons, Jacob and Esau. However, only one of those sons was the seed of promise, the promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, which Jehovah had promised to him several times.

The last time God spoke that promise to Abraham was after he proved his absolute faith in him by obeying God's command that he sacrifice Isaac, his son of promise, as a burnt offering. However, at the last moment God stopped him. Then the record says, **"And the agent of Jehovah called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because thou have done this thing, and have not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou have obeyed my voice"** (Genesis 22:15-18).

God chose Jacob instead of Esau to be the son of that promise. It would be through Jacob that God would fulfill his promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God later began to call Jacob by the name of Israel. And it was through him that the twelve patriarchs were born, from which came the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. And it was through the nation of Israel that God gave us the Holy Bible. And it was through the nation of Israel that Christ our Savior was born. Therefore, all the nations of the earth have truly been blessed by the seed of God's promise to Abraham.

Notice how Paul mentioned God's purpose according to selection. In his great plan God chose only one of the sons of Isaac to be the seed of promise. That son was Jacob, and he was chosen even before he was born. He was not chosen by any works that he did. Jehovah's love for Jacob over Esau was not something Jacob earned or deserved. It was simply to fulfill God's purpose according to selection, the selection of one man not two. Moreover, God determined even before they were born that the older Esau would serve the younger Jacob.

Now that does not mean God was partial to Jacob. Remember what Paul said earlier in the book: **"For there is no partiality with God"** (Romans 2:11). God made me a man and my wife a woman. We had nothing to do about that choice. Nevertheless, God commands my wife to be subservient to me: **"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord"** (Ephesians 5:22). It is not our choice; it is God's plan for us while we live in this world. Making us different, with different talents and different roles, does not mean God is partial. For in the final judgment in heaven justice will be done. Therefore, trust God that he is not partial in the final analysis.

The passage that Paul quoted about Jacob being loved and Esau regarded inferior is from the book of Malachi: **"The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says Jehovah. Yet ye say, How have thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother, says Jehovah. Yet I loved Jacob, but Esau I regarded inferior, and made his mountains a desolation, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness"** (Malachi 1:1-3).

Although Jehovah regarded Esau inferior to Jacob, the desolation of his country was caused by the later sinfulness of his descendants. Remember, even the country of Israel was made desolate because of the sinfulness of Israel's descendants.

There are many things about us in this life that we have no control over, including things that God has determined about us. However, there are many things about us in this life that we do have control over. And it is from those things that we will be judged. Paul speaks more about those things next.

No injustice from God

- **What will we say then? Is there injustice from God? May it not happen!** (Romans 9:14).

Paul clearly says that there is no injustice from God. Regarding the differences among us, remember, it is impossible for everyone to be given exactly the same things and to be treated exactly the same way. Moreover, there is strength in differences, as long as there is also unity.

The organization of civilizations can be compared to a body. And Paul told how important differences were in the parts of a body, when he said, **"For the body also is not one part, but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand I am not of the body, it is not by this not of the body. And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye I am not of the body, it is not by this not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But**

now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as he intended" (First Corinthians 12:14-18).

Paul went on to tell how God made all of the parts important in their special ways. Therefore, when God places some persons above others it is not injustice from God. For God cannot be unjust. Remember what the psalmist said about him: **"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne"** (Psalm 97:2). Therefore, trust God and accept whatever differences he makes of us, even when he regards us inferior (in this life), because **"all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose"** (Romans 8:28).

Mercy to whom God wills

- **For he says to Moses, I will be merciful to whom I may be merciful, and I will be compassionate to whomever I may be compassionate. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who is merciful** (Romans 9:15-16).

Paul here speaks of God's mercy and compassion. God is never cruel or ruthless in whatever he does. He allowed Satan to be cruel to Job causing him to suffer greatly. But it was only temporary, and for a great purpose. It proved that a man's suffering is not always caused by his guilt. And God blessed Job twice as much after his suffering was over.

God commanded his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to allow himself to suffer a cruel death on the cross. But that was so Jesus could defeat God's enemies and become our Redeemer to save our souls. And now Jesus reigns with God in heaven over all things.

Regarding God's mercy and compassion, most of the things about our lives are outside of our control; they are in the hands of God. And he decides who receives his blessings. He decides what kind of body we are born with, and who are parents are, and in what country and what generation we are born. He decides many of the kinds of afflictions we suffer. He decides many of the opportunities we are given. The list is almost endless. Therefore, most of the things of our lives are not determined by our own will.

Yet never forget that God always does that which is good and right and just. Therefore, trust him, even when we suffer unjustly, because **"all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose"** (Romans 8:28).

And remember what Paul said about our suffering and our glory: **"For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us"** (Romans 8:15-18).

The example of Pharaoh

- **For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this same thing I raised thee up, that I might display in thee my power, and that my name might be proclaimed**

in all the earth. So then he is merciful to whom he will, and whom he will he hardens (Romans 9:17-18).

All things did not work together for good to Pharaoh because he did not love God. Therefore, God manipulated Pharaoh in order to display his mighty power and that his name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Even before Jehovah sent Moses to ask Pharaoh to release the Israelites, God said to Moses, **“When thou go back into Egypt, see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in thy hand, but I will harden his heart and he will not let the people go”** (Exodus 4:21).

It was God who raised up Pharaoh to power. And it was God who hardened his heart to refuse Moses, which refusals brought upon the land of Egypt ten terrible plagues (see Exodus 5-11). And it was by those plagues that God displayed his power, and that his name was proclaimed in all the earth. For all the nations heard of what God did.

Therefore, God had already judged Pharaoh and condemned him. God allowed Pharaoh to remain alive so that he could prevent him from releasing the people of Israel before the plagues were over. For God had already judged the people of Egypt and condemned them to suffer those plagues. He condemned them because of how they had enslaved his people and made them suffer. Everything God does is good and right and just, even though we often cannot see it.

Dear reader, God has always ruled in the affairs of men, and he still rules in them. He rules in their affairs invisibly but assuredly. And **“he is merciful to whom he will, and whom he will he hardens.”** Nevertheless, everything he does is good and right and just. And never forget that **“all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). Therefore, love and trust him, because his promises to us are sure.

The rights of God for his purposes

- **Thou will say to me therefore, Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his purpose? Rather, O man, who are thou answering back to God? No, will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why did thou make me this way? Or has the potter no right over the clay, from the same lump certainly to make this vessel for esteem, and that for disesteem?** (Romans 9:19-21).

Paul anticipates the complaining about God finding fault with us if what happens **“is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who is merciful.”** However, instead of showing how God can do those things justly, Paul reminds us of the right that God has to do whatever he desires with what he makes. Therefore, we have no right to complain when he makes some things for esteem and some for disesteem.

Instead we should rejoice that God is giving us the opportunity to become his sons for eternity, regardless of whether we are required to serve as a vessel of esteem or of disesteem in this life. For this life is only for a short time, as James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away”** (James 4:14), while our afterlife is forever.

Vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy

- **And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, namely us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from Gentiles (Romans 9:22-24).**

Throughout history God has endured sinful men with much longsuffering. Few people realize that God suffers from our sins. God is so intimately involved with the world that whatever we do affects him. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Even as disciples of Christ we can grieve his Holy Spirit. Consider this admonition that Paul gave to his brothers at Ephesus: **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye are sealed for a day of redemption”** (Ephesians 4:30). Therefore, God is truly longsuffering toward the sins of men.

God wants to show his wrath against the vessels of wrath (unrepentant sinners) and to make his power known. He wants to show his wrath and his power because the sinners of the world ignore and belittle him, deriding his importance, and denying his power and authority. God also wants to make known the wealth of his glory upon the vessels of mercy (all who love and trust him).

However, he has and will endure the vessels of wrath with longsuffering for our sakes, so that he can make known the wealth of his glory to us. Remember, this is a world of testing, to select the souls worthy to become his sons for eternity. Therefore, he is giving men time to repent.

Remember also something else that Paul said about God’s longsuffering: **“Or do thou despise the wealth of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness, and thy impenitent heart, thou store up wrath to thyself in the day of wrath, and revealing, and righteous judgment of God, who will render to each man according to his works, to those who indeed seek by perseverance of good work, glory and honor and immortality—eternal life”** (Romans 2:4-7).

God previously prepared the vessels of mercy for glory even before he created the world. He created his great master plans of the world so that every soul who loves him and his righteousness would ultimately receive the wealth of his glory. That choice to love him and his righteousness is ours to make. And now through his Son Jesus Christ, God is calling us for that glory. God is calling every man, from both Jews and Gentiles, to make of himself one of the souls that God previously prepared for glory. For God has given every man the power to obey him or not, to love truth and righteousness or not.

Not his people now his people

- **As also he says in Hosea, I will call those not my people, my people, and her who was not beloved, beloved. And it will be in the place where it was said**

to them, Ye are not my people, there they will be called, sons of the living God (Romans 9:25-26).

Those words are from two separate passages from the book of Hosea. Here is the first one that Paul referred to: **“And I will have mercy upon her who had not obtained mercy. And I will say to those who were not my people, Thou are my people, and they shall say, My God”** (Hosea 2:23). And here is the second one: **“And it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said to them, The sons of the living God”** (Hosea 1:10).

What Paul said are not exact quotations, but words from them. Those words prophesy how Gentiles will become God’s people. The sons of Israel had been God’s people beloved by him. But now righteous souls from the Gentiles are his people, are beloved, and are sons of the living God. They become his people, his beloved, and his sons when they become faithful disciples of God’s Son Jesus Christ.

The remnant of Israel will be saved

- **And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, If the number of the sons of Israel may be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. Since he is completing and finishing quickly a matter in righteousness, because a matter that has been cut short upon the earth, the Lord will perform.**
- **And just as Isaiah has foretold, Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a seed, we would have become as Sodom, and would have been made like Gomorrah (Romans 9:27-29).**

The passage that Paul quoted from Isaiah about the remnant of Israel is this one: **“For though thy people, Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return”** (Isaiah 10:22). The passage he quoted from Isaiah about becoming as Sodom and being made like Gomorrah is this one: **“Unless Jehovah of hosts had left to us a seed, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like Gomorrah”** (Isaiah 1:9). Both of those passages prophesy how only a few souls from Israel will be saved. And that has certainly come to pass. For there are very few Hebrews that have believed in Jesus Christ, compared with the great majority of them.

What Paul said between those two passages is about the Lord completing and finishing a matter in righteousness that had been cut short. And those words do not appear to have been spoken by Isaiah. What they mean is not clear. However, they probably refer to the crucifixion of Christ.

Jesus was promoting God and his righteousness while he was upon on the earth. However, the wicked rulers of the Jews had him crucified after only three years of his ministry. Hence his righteousness had been **“cut short upon the earth.”** Nevertheless, the Lord completed and finished his righteousness by raising him from the dead and sending out his apostles to establish the kingdom of God, the church.

Righteousness by faith or by law

- **What will we say then? That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness from faith. But Israel who pursued a law of righteousness, did not arrive to a law of righteousness. Why? Because it was not from faith but as from works of law (Romans 9:30-32).**

There are two ways to be righteous before God: (1) we can be righteous by obeying all of his laws, and (2) we can be righteous by having faith in him. Jesus was righteous both ways. He lived a sinless life, and he trusted God completely.

However, we can only be righteous before God by faith, because none of us have the moral and spiritual strength to keep from ever violating his law. And a single violation makes us unrighteous. Hence, Israel failed to achieve righteousness before God. For they sought to be righteous through works of law instead of faith.

They think righteousness is achieved through obedience to a legal system. But commitment to legal systems always results in being condemned. Legal systems condemn because nobody can keep from ever violating them. And justice demands that any violation makes a man a criminal deserving of punishment, proper punishment. That failure is why lawlessness is increasing in our land.

Righteousness before God can only be achieved by faith and trust in him. And that is why the Gentiles have attained righteousness before God, even though they did not pursue it. They attained righteousness by their faith in Jesus Christ. Remember, Paul explained all of those things earlier in this book.

The stone of stumbling

- **For they stumbled at the stone of stumbling, just as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. And every man who believes in him will not be shamed (Romans 9:32-33).**

Jesus was the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense. He offended the Jews, and their spirits stumbled and fell because of him. He offended the Jews in many ways. He was entirely different from what they believed their Messiah would be like. They expected a warrior-king like David.

Even the people where he was raised were offended by him, as this passage says: **“And having come into his fatherland he taught them in their synagogue, so as for them to be astonished, and say, From where is this wisdom and powers in this man? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all near us? From where then are all these things in this man? And they were offended by him”** (Matthew 13:54-57).

He also offended the Jews by his teachings. For example, remember this passage: **“And having called in the multitude, he said to them, Hear and understand. Not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this**

defiles the man. Then having come near, his disciples said to him, Know thou that the Pharisees were offended when they heard the saying?" (Matthew 15:10-12).

And Jesus continues to be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. For many people stumble and fall because they cannot believe in him. And his commandments and his teachings (truthfully presented) are offensive to many souls. That is why the world hates him. Those things are why Jesus blessed those who are not offended by him: **"And blessed is he, whoever will not be offended by me"** (Luke 7:23).

Yet I must confess that I continually marvel that anybody could be offended by him. I cannot conceive of ever being offended by him, because I love him, his truth, and his righteousness. And the more I learn of him the more I love him. Indeed, I am compelled to love him, because not loving him is evil, wrong, and unjust. It is even cruel and heartless, more cruel and heartless than failing to love the tender loving care of our fathers and mothers.

Here is the prophecy Paul mentioned about the stone of stumbling: **"Jehovah of hosts, him ye shall sanctify, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary, but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a net and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken"** (Isaiah 8:13-15).

And here is the prophecy he mentioned about not being shamed: **"Therefore hear the word of Jehovah, ye scoffers, who rule this people that is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and we are at agreement with Sheol. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through it shall not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and we have hid ourselves under falsehood. Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation. He who believes in him shall, no, not be shamed"** (Isaiah 28:14-16).

We who believe in him will not be shamed before God in the afterlife. For Jesus said, **"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, so that he may not walk naked, and they see his shame"** (Revelation 16:15).

A wrong zeal of God

- **Brothers, truly my heart's desire and my supplication to God for Israel is for salvation. For I testify to them that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For not understanding the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of law for righteousness, to every man who believes** (Romans 10:1-4).

Although Paul was an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, he earnestly desired and pleaded to God for the salvation of Israel. And although his greatest opposition and persecution was from the Jews, he willingly testified even for them about their zeal of God. Their failure, however, was that their zeal was not according to knowledge. It was a misguided zeal that actually made them God's enemies.

It was misguided because they did not understand the righteousness of God. They did not understand because they rejected the Son of God, which put a veil upon their heart. For Paul said, **“But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:15-16).

Refusing to submit to the righteousness of God, they have sought to establish their own righteousness, a righteousness based upon law. Not only do they claim obedience to the laws of Moses, but over the centuries they have created a great host of statutes and ordinances that they call their oral law, which they claim is God’s righteousness. However, it is a false and vain righteousness.

The righteousness of God is not based upon law. It is based upon faith in him. Obedience to law is outward and superficial. Faith in God is inward and from the heart. Laws can be used wrongfully. They can be used to create sin and injustice because laws are blind. However, faith in God can never create sin and injustice. Therefore, Christ is the end of law for righteousness, the end of legal systems in our relationship with God. He does not want outward and superficial obedience only. He wants our complete faith and trust in him, which guarantees true righteousness.

Lawyers are careful to obey the law, but that does not make them the most righteous men. Indeed, Jesus cursed the lawyers for their unrighteousness. For example, he said, **“Woe also to you lawyers! Because ye load men with burdens difficult to bear, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers”** (Luke 11:46).

All who believe and obey God’s Son Jesus Christ are the most righteous men. They are the most righteous because they are motivated in their hearts to be righteous. They seek justice not obedience to blind laws, which often defeats justice. The longer you live in this world the more evidence you will see of that. Those who do not have faith use law like a game to win according to rules, not according to what is good and right and just.

Righteousness from law versus faith

- **For Moses writes in the righteousness from the law, that the man that does them will live in them. But the righteousness from faith says thus: Thou should not say in thy heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or, Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) (Romans 10:5-7).**

When Moses gave the law it was God’s law. And here is what God said to Moses about living in them: **“Ye shall do my ordinances, and ye shall keep my statutes, to walk therein. I am Jehovah your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live in them. I am Jehovah”** (Leviticus 18:4-5).

That means if a man obeys God’s law then God will not condemn his soul to perish. However, as with Adam, God will condemn a man for a single violation. Therefore, **“the man that does them [every one of them] will live in them.”** His perfect obedience will keep his soul from being condemned to perish.

However, Paul said that the righteousness from faith is not based upon obedience to a legal system. He then gave an illustration about trusting God without demanding to know

everything. The questions that Paul asked were about deep things beyond our capability to understand.

A modern example of such questions that I have heard, is how God could have no beginning. The answer is clearly beyond our comprehension. We who believe and trust God accept that. It is only the unbelievers and the scoffers that demand to know such things.

Faith means trusting God

- **But what does it say? The word is near thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith that we preach: that if thou wilt confess with thy mouth, Lord Jesus, and wilt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou wilt be saved. For a man believes in the heart for righteousness, and he confesses with the mouth for salvation. For the scripture says, Every man who believes in him will not be shamed (Romans 10:8-11).**

Paul asked the question what does the righteousness of faith say? And he answered it with words that Moses said to the sons of Israel about knowledge of the law: **“But the word is very near to thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou may do it”** (Deuteronomy 30:14). Paul took those words about our mouth and our heart, and applied them to the word of faith. For the word of faith is also near us, in our mouths, and in our hearts, that we may do it.

And that word of faith is to confess with our mouth, Lord Jesus, and to believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead. That is the way of God’s righteousness for us, and the way of our salvation.

Paul went on to say that **“a man believes in the heart for righteousness.”** True belief in God is a trusting faith in him and his righteousness. And when a man truly believes in his heart, then he will strive for righteousness. Paul also added that a man **“confesses with the mouth for salvation.”** A man may strive for righteousness, but unless he proclaims his faith in Christ he will not be saved.

We must let the world know that we do believe in him, so they will know that our righteousness is because of our faith in Christ, and not anything else. We must give him the honor by the confession of our faith, and by our testimony to others. And an important part of our confession of faith in Christ is proving it by our obedience to him. As James said, **“But some man will say, Thou have faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith from thy works, and I will show thee from my works my faith”** (James 2:18). Let not men lead you astray by claiming all we need for salvation is faith only.

Our faith in God and Christ—a trusting and obedient faith—and our confession of that faith will keep us from being shamed with the sinners of the world. Shame is a severe form of disgrace and a painful humiliation. But we who believe Jesus Christ in our hearts and confess him with our mouths will never be shamed in that greater world of heaven.

Salvation is available for all men

- **For there is no distinction of a Jew and also of a Greek, for the same Lord is of all men, being rich toward all those who call upon him. For every man, whoever may call upon the name of the Lord will be saved** (Romans 10:12-13).

In the past God had chosen the race of Abraham to be his special people. But now there is no distinction. Through his Son Jesus Christ **“whoever may call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”** God’s special people are now the disciples of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles (who are also called Greeks).

The Lord God is of all men, not just of one race. And as Paul said, he is rich toward all those who call upon him. Remember what Paul said earlier: **“But glory and honor and peace is to every man who works good, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God”** (Romans 2:10-11).

When Paul said that God was rich toward all those who call upon the Lord, and whoever may call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, he was not teaching faith only. Calling upon the Lord, or upon his name, is like having faith in him. Faith in God is not mere belief; it is a trusting and working faith. Likewise calling upon the Lord is not merely uttering words; it is believing in him with that trusting and working faith. For James also said, **“So also faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself”** (James 2:17).

The need for preaching

- **How then will they call on whom they have not believed? And how will they believe of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without preaching? And how will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news of peace, of those who proclaim good news of good things** (Romans 10:14-15).

Paul listed five steps that are necessary to bring souls to God. First, the word of God must be sent out; second, it must be proclaimed; third, souls must listen to it; fourth, they must believe it; and fifth, when they believe it then they can call upon the Lord for salvation.

The word of God must be sent out and proclaimed. When that is done salvation then depends upon men listening and believing. Hence, the process of bringing souls to God involves the availability of the word of God, plus the receptiveness of men to it.

And “preaching” or making the word of God available can be done in many ways, either by word of mouth or in the writings of scripture. And making it available by word of mouth can be to groups or to individuals, it can be by formal preaching or by informal conversation. It can also be done in writings, which is what I am doing. Promoting the word of God can be done in many ways.

The passage Paul quoted is from the prophet Isaiah: **“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Thy God reigns!”** (Isaiah 52:7).

Those are, of course, figurative words. A man's feet are said to be beautiful when he brings good news. His feet are beautiful because they are the instruments that bring him. And whatever brings good news to us is seen as beautiful. The feet of Jesus Christ were the most beautiful of all, because he was the first to bring the good news from God of our eternal salvation. And the feet of every man are beautiful when he follows in the steps of Jesus to bring the word of the good news to us.

Not all believe and obey

- **But not all were obedient to the good news, for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:16-17).**

The good news is the message of Jesus Christ, which he began to proclaim from the beginning of his ministry. As Matthew said, **"And Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people"** (Matthew 4:23).

However, as Paul said, not all believed and were obedient to the good news. Indeed, only a remnant of the Jews has every been obedient to it. Nevertheless, what Jesus brought is truly good news from God. Indeed, it is the very best news, because it offers us the hope of living for eternity as sons of God in heaven with him.

The passage Paul quoted was near the beginning of Isaiah's great prophecy about the Christ, which describes remarkable details about his rejection and sufferings. I quote that prophecy in its entirety below:

"Behold, my servant shall deal wisely. He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him. For that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall understand.

"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as him from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

"Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

"He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is mute before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the

transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him. He has put him to grief.

“When thou shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed. He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied. By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

The word went into all the world

- **But I say, did they, no, not hear? Rather, Their voice went forth into all the earth, and their sayings to the limits of the inhabited world** (Romans 10:18).

Paul said the reason “**not all were obedient to the good news**” is not because they did not have a chance to hear. He then quoted from the psalm about how available the word of the good news is: **“There is no speech nor language in which their voice is not heard. Their line [the Septuagint says their voice] has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world”** (Psalm 19:3-4).

Provoked to jealousy and anger

- **But I say, did Israel, no, not know? First Moses says, I will provoke you to jealousy toward a non-nation. Toward a foolish nation, I will make you angry** (Romans 10:19).

The reason not all were obedient is not because of the ignorance of Israel. Paul then quoted a prophecy from Moses about how Israel would be provoked to jealousy with a non-nation. That non-nation is the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ. And its growth has eclipsed and supplanted Israel as the people of God. Hence, the sons of Israel are now jealous of it.

Paul also quoted a prophecy from Moses about how God would make Israel angry toward a foolish nation. The reference to a foolish nation probably symbolizes the many Gentile nations. The people of Israel considered Gentiles to be a foolish people, spiritually foolish. Yet those people were obedient to the good news of Christ. Hence, the sons of Israel were angry that we Gentiles are now claiming to be the children of God.

Here is the prophecy of Moses that Paul quoted: **“They have provoked me to anger with their vanities, and I will move them to jealousy with a non-nation. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation”** (Deuteronomy 32:21).

God was found by those not seeking

- **And Isaiah is very bold and says, I was found by those not seeking me. I became manifest to those not asking for me (Romans 10:20).**

Here is that prophecy from the book of Isaiah: **“I was manifested by those who did not ask for me. I am found by those who did not seek me. I said, Behold me, behold me, to a nation that was not called by my name”** (Isaiah 65:1).

Most Gentiles knew little of Jehovah, and they were not seeking him the way the sons of Israel claimed to be. There were a few Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes who did obey the good news, but most Gentiles were converted from paganism. Therefore, God was found by those not seeking him, and manifested to those not asking for him.

All day God stretched forth his hands

- **But to Israel he says, The whole day I stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and rebellious people (Romans 10:21).**

God manifested himself to those not asking for him, because Israel was **“a disobedient and rebellious people.”** God had continually reached out to them, but they were continually disobedient and rebellious. Paul quoted the scripture about that, which is also from the book of Isaiah: **“I have spread out my hands all the day to a disobedient and rebellious people ...”** (Isaiah 65:2). If you want to know how much God stretched forth his hands to the disobedient and rebellious Israelites, just read the history of them in the old testament scriptures.

Here is what Moses said about them near the end of his life: **“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you”** (Deuteronomy 9:24). And here is what the scriptures said about them near the destruction of their nation: **“Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy”** (Second Chronicles 36:14-16).

God reserved a remnant

- **I say therefore, did God thrust away his people? May it not happen! For I also am an Israelite from the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God did not thrust away his people whom he foreknew.**
- **Or know ye not what the scripture tells by Elijah? How he encounters God about Israel. Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and they have torn down thine altars, and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what does the**

divine response say to him? I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed a knee to Baal.

- **So then also at this present time there has become a remnant according to the selection of grace** (Romans 11:1-5).

Although God has called the Gentiles to the good news of Christ, he has not thrust away his people Israel. Although the people of Israel rejected their Messiah and even crucified him, not all rejected him. Paul used himself as an example that God has not thrust away all the sons of Israel, his people whom he foreknew. For God has reserved a remnant of them who do believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

God has always reserved for himself a remnant, men who love him and his righteousness. And Paul gives a good example of that from the story of Elijah: **“And he [Elijah] said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts. For the sons of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.**

“And Jehovah said to him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus. ... Yet I have reserved *for me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him” (First Kings 19:14-18).

Whenever I lament about the sinfulness of my country and that of the rest of the world, I remember God’s answer to Elijah when he thought he was the only man remaining in Israel who still loved God. Jehovah said to him, **“Yet I have reserved *for me* seven thousand”** I thank God that he always reserves for himself many righteous souls even during times of great sinfulness.

Grace versus works

- **And if it is by grace, it is no longer from works, otherwise grace becomes no longer grace. But if it is from works it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work** (Romans 11:6).

After explaining how God told Elijah that he reserved for himself a remnant, Paul then said, **“So then also at this present time there has become a remnant according to the selection of grace.”** And he added, **“And if it is by grace, it is no longer from works, otherwise grace becomes no longer grace.”**

Expressed another way, Paul’s words say something like this: By grace means it is a gift, not a wage that is earned. Otherwise a gift is no longer a gift. But if it is a wage, then it is no longer a gift. Otherwise a wage is no longer a wage. What Paul means is that grace is entirely different from works. You cannot make them equivalent.

For example, Paul said to the Galatians who wanted to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses, **“And I solemnly declare again to every man who is circumcised, that he is obligated to do the whole law. Ye were discharged from the Christ, ye who are made righteous by law. Ye have fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:3-4). Remember, righteousness from the law is based upon works only—strict obedience to law. While grace is based upon faith, an obedient faith. They are entirely different ways of pursuing righteousness.

The rest were hardened

- **What then? What Israel seeks, this it did not obtain. But the chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened, just as it is written that God gave them a spirit of slumber: eyes not to see, and ears not to hear, until this very day. And David says, Let their table become for a snare, and for a trap, and for a stumbling block, and for a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened, not to see, and may thou bow down their back always (Romans 11:7-10).**

Israel sought righteousness but failed. They failed because they sought it from works of the law, but law always condemns because nobody can keep it perfectly. The chosen of God did obtain righteousness because they sought it from faith. Remember, the chosen of God are the sheep of Christ, the humble and lowly in spirit, men who have open minds to accept his word, and who strive for that which is good and right and just. Those kinds of people obtain the righteousness of God.

The remaining souls, those who are not humble and lowly in spirit, and have closed minds to accept his word, and who have no interest in that which is good and right and just, those souls were hardened. God hardens their hearts because he does not want them to turn and be healed. He does not want them to become his sons for eternity, because they are not worthy of it.

And that is why the Lord said these words to Isaiah: **“Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed”** (Isaiah 6:9-10).

And Isaiah said later to the people of Ariel (Jerusalem): **“Tarry ye and wonder, take your pleasure and be blind. They are drunken, but not with wine. They stagger, but not with strong drink. For Jehovah has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes. The prophets, and your heads, the seers, he has covered”** (Isaiah 29:9-10).

And the Lord gave the reason for dulling their intellect: **“Inasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but have removed their heart far from me, but in vain they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men”** (Isaiah 29:13).

Paul also quoted David who told how God turned against them and blinded their hearts: **“Let their table before them become a snare, and when they are in peace, a trap, and for a stumbling block, and for a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and bow down their back continually”** (Psalm 69:22-23).

Therefore, dear reader, do not wonder at the inability of unrepentant sinners to understand the word of God. For God himself has hardened their hearts so they cannot see and hear. However, if they do humble themselves, and open their minds to God’s word, and begin to pursue that which is good and right and just in the sight of God, then God will enable them to see and hear. For remember what Paul said about the Jews: **“But to this day when**

Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (Second Corinthians 3:15-16).

Provoking to jealousy

- **I say then, did they stumble so that they would fall? May it not happen! But in their transgression, salvation is to the Gentiles, in order to provoke them to jealousy** (Romans 11:11).

The question Paul asked about Israel stumbling and falling is about *all* of them, which never happened. For all of the apostles of Jesus were Jews, and they were faithful to God (except for Judas Iscariot), as well as many other Jews who became part of the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the great majority of Israel was unfaithful by rejecting their Messiah whom God sent to them.

God has always chosen a special people for himself. First it was the descendants of Adam, as distinct from the rest of mankind—the sons of God versus the sons of men (see Genesis 6:2). I explain all of that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Then after the great flood God chose Abraham and his descendant, the Hebrew race, to be his special people. And now his special people are the disciples of his Son Jesus Christ.

If the Hebrews had been faithful to God by accepting the Christ, then they would have continued to be his chosen people. Their Messiah Jesus Christ would have built his church from them. They would have continued to be what God always wanted of them. For when they first arrived at mount Sinai, he said to them, through Moses, **"... ye shall be my own possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation"** (Exodus 19:5-6).

They would have continued to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And the Gentiles would have been invited to become proselytes of that new holy nation, which would be based, not upon the righteousness of the law of Moses, but upon the righteousness of the good news of the kingdom of God, the good news that Jesus taught.

But the Jews transgressed. Therefore, salvation is now to the Gentiles. We Gentiles who believe are now God's chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. For Peter said about us, **"But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession, so that ye might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Men formerly not a people, but now are a people of God. Men who had not obtained mercy, but who now have obtained mercy"** (First Peter 2:9-10).

However, God has not completely abandoned his former people. For one of the reasons he has chosen the Gentiles to be **"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession"** is to provoke them to jealousy. Even while they transgress, God continues trying to save their souls.

And their jealousy of Christ's church is a prod or a goad to help bring them to him. Remember one of the things that the Lord said to Paul when he first appeared to him: **"Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads"** (Acts 26:14). God uses things like goads (figuratively speaking) to bring us to him.

Israel and wealth of the world

- **Now if their transgression is wealth of the world, and their failure is wealth of Gentiles, how much more their fullness?** (Romans 11:12).

The failure of the Hebrews to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation caused God to choose the Gentiles instead. Therefore, **“their transgression is wealth of the world, and their failure is wealth of Gentiles.”** God’s royal priesthood and holy nation is now the church of Jesus Christ, which is spread throughout all the Gentile nations of the world. And Christians have a leavening effect on the righteousness of whatever nation where they reside. And that is a blessing for any nation.

That means the conversion of the Jews to the kingdom of God would mean an even greater blessing for the world. For they have a very rich heritage in God. Remember, every book in the Bible, which is the word of God to man, was written by Hebrews. United with the Gentile Christians, the Jews could make a great contribution to the cause of Christ, bringing glory and honor to God, and blessings wherever they are.

For the disciples of Christ are the very best people in the world in terms of their spirit and character. Therefore, the righteousness of nations where they have influence is increased. And remember what Solomon said about righteousness and nations: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

Provoking to jealousy to save

- **For I speak to you the Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am indeed an apostle of Gentiles, I enhance my ministry, if somehow I may provoke my flesh to jealousy and may save some of them** (Romans 11:13-14).

Paul was writing to the Gentiles, explaining God’s relationship with the Hebrews. He was writing to them because he was an apostle of Gentiles. Yet he did what he could to try to save his countrymen. Thus, he enhanced his ministry to the Gentiles in his service to Christ, while hoping that would help provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that he might save some of them.

It was a kind of double ministry. He served the Lord as an apostle of Gentiles. However, in order to also convert Jews he enhanced his ministry. Thus, his efforts to save some of his countrymen was indirect. It did not detract from his ministry for the Gentiles, but actually enhanced that ministry. It was a brilliant way for him to both strengthen his apostleship of the Gentiles, as well as helping to save Jews.

Reconciliation and life from the dead

- **For if the casting away of them is reconciliation of the world, what is the acceptance except life from the dead?** (Romans 11:15).

When God chose Gentiles instead of the Jews, that reconciled the world. It reconciled the world by creating the international brotherhood called the church of Christ. Before that great brotherhood the nations of the world were all spiritually divided. Now souls from

everywhere in the world are part of one great brotherhood, worshiping and serving one God, the true God. Of course, not all men have chosen to belong, but that does not stop the reconciliation.

Since God reconciles the world through Christ and his church, then when the Jews are converted to Christ and again accepted by God, then it will be like life from the dead. What Paul seems to imply is that when the Jewish people become Christian, then there will be a great spiritual revival. Which means many souls will turn away from sin and death to the righteousness of God and eternal life.

The root and the branches

- **And if the first fruit is holy, the branch is also. And if the root is holy, the branches are also. And if some of the branches were broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and became a joint partaker of the root of the fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if thou boast, thou do not bear the root, but the root thee** (Romans 11:16-18).

Paul now uses the analogy of an olive tree to compare the Jews and the Gentile Christians, comparing the old people of God with his new ones. God is the root and trunk of the olive tree, and the people are the branches. Some of the Jews, branches of the olive tree, were broken off because of their transgressions. While Gentiles, branches from a wild olive tree, were grafted in among the branches. That enabled them to be joint partakers of the spiritual blessings of God, the root and fatness of the olive tree.

However, Paul also warns the Gentiles not to boast against the disobedient Jews, the branches that were broken off. We should remember that we are still mere branches. We do not bring God's blessings, bearing the root, but he brings the blessings to us; he bears us.

We should always remember that the Hebrew people were chosen by God to preserve his righteousness. And for two thousand years men among them did. Indeed, they preserved it in the very best way, by writing the holy scriptures of God, so that the ways of righteousness would never be forgotten. On the other hand, the Gentiles were lost in the wilderness of false religions that was filled with evil and darkness. We were part of a wild olive tree, useless for any good.

Branches grafted in

- **Thou wilt therefore say, Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. Correct! They were broken off for their unbelief, and thou stand by thy faith. Be not high-minded but fear, for if God spared not the natural branches, perhaps neither will he spare thee** (Romans 11:19-21).

Paul warns against being high-minded about God rejecting the Jews for the Gentiles. He said that instead of boasting about it we should fear. We should fear God because if he rejected his own people Israel, then he could certainly reject any one of us. God rejected

his people Israel because of their unbelief. Therefore, it is by our faith that we stand, our faith in his Son Jesus Christ.

Too many people in this adulterous generation of Americans proclaim the grace of God to those who believe, but they neglect to mention his wrath against whoever sins. Many claim that the examples of God's wrath described in the Old Testament record no longer apply. They say that God is now more gentle, permissive, and forgiving. What they say is false teaching. Consider next what Paul wrote about God's severity.

The goodness and the severity of God

- **Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God. Indeed toward those who fell, severity, but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness, otherwise thou too will be cut off** (Romans 11:22).

God is both kind and severe. Besides the people of Israel, there are many other examples throughout history to show God's severity toward those who fell because of sin. Adam was driven out of the garden of Eden and condemned to die. The antediluvian world was destroyed by the great flood. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone. Who then would be so proud as to think God would not be severe to him if he fell, fell away into sin?

Yet God is good toward those who have faith in him, as long as they continue in his goodness. Remember, God is not partial toward our eternal spirits. Therefore, even those who belong to Christ will be cut off if they turn from his good news of salvation. Paul even told how he could be cut off, when he spoke about self-control: **"But I give my body a black eye and subdue it, lest somehow having preached to others, I myself might become disqualified"** (First Corinthians 9:27).

Grafted back in

- **And also those, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural ones, be grafted into their own olive tree** (Romans 11:23-24).

Although souls will be cut off from God when they become sinful, when they repent they can be accepted again. Paul illustrates that with his analogy of the olive tree. Since the natural branches that were cut off can more easily be grafted in again, then the rejected Jews can more easily be brought back to God when they repent. They can more easily be brought back to God because of their long heritage with him. In contrast the Gentile Christians (the foreign branches) came from paganism (the wild olive tree). Therefore, it was less natural for them to learn about God and his righteousness (to be grafted in).

The mystery of their eventual salvation

- **For I do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise according to yourselves, that a callousness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And that way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The man who delivers will come from Zion, and will turn away impiety from Jacob. And this is the covenant from me to them when I will take away their sins (Romans 11:25-27).**

The callousness of the Hebrews until the fullness of the Gentiles come in is indeed a mystery, and all I can do is conjecture about it. The Hebrews were God's chosen people for about two thousand years, beginning with Abraham and ending with Christ. Gentile Christians now comprise the great majority of God's people, and they have been for about two thousand years. I suspect that when those two time spans equalize, that will result in the sons of Israel embracing Christ equally with the Gentiles. That may be what the fullness of the Gentiles means. God first choosing the Hebrews, then later the Gentiles, prevents either class of men from boasting.

When Paul said that all Israel will be saved he could not have meant that every Hebrew would receive eternal salvation. He must have been referring to the salvation of Israel as an earthly nation. The nation of Israel would be restored, converted to Christ, and established as a secure and fruitful country for God and his righteousness.

The prophecy Paul quoted about the man who delivers is this one: **"And he who redeems will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, says Jehovah. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says Jehovah: ..."** (Isaiah 59:20-21). Being redeemed is a form of deliverance, and the man who delivers is our Redeemer Jesus Christ (Zion refers to Jerusalem).

The prophecy Paul quoted about the covenant and God taking away their sins may be this one: **"Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"** (Jeremiah 31:31-34). That too refers to Christ and his good news of our salvation.

A little farther on Paul explains why a callousness in part has happened to Israel. It is because God has confined all men in disobedience.

God's gifts and calling are irrevocable

- **They are indeed enemies toward the good news for your sake, but toward selection, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:28-29).**

As a class of people the Hebrews are enemies toward the good news of Christ. They are enemies so that God's chosen people can now come primarily from the Gentiles. However, they are still a people chosen by God. For God promised their patriarchs, Abraham Isaac and Jacob, that he would build of them a nation. And as Paul said, **"the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."** Therefore, they will always be beloved by God.

Remember, many other nations during ancient times no longer exist and their people have lost their identity. For example, Edom was the nation founded by the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. But now that nation no longer exists and nobody calls himself an Edomite. In contrast, because of God's promise, the Hebrew people will always exist (although they are now called Jews).

Receiving God's mercy

- **For as ye once were also disobedient to God, but now have received mercy at the disobedience of these, so also now these have been disobedient for thy mercy, so that they also may receive mercy** (Romans 11:30-31).

Gentiles who were once disobedient received mercy because of the disobedience of the Jews. Gentiles received mercy because God chose them to be his people instead of Israel. He chose them because Israel was disobedient.

So now the Jews in their disobedience will also receive mercy. They will receive mercy the same way the Gentiles receive mercy: by believing Jesus Christ, repenting of their sins, and obeying his good news of our salvation.

Thus neither Jews nor Gentiles can boast, because our salvation is a gift of God's mercy. They cannot boast because all men have been disobedient. And Paul explains why next.

All men are confined in disobedience

- **For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all** (Romans 11:32).

God has confined all men in disobedience for a great and loving purpose. God first allowed Adam to bring sin into the world. And he has allowed the world to become filled with evils and temptations. Indeed, God so made the world that no mere man can live a sinless life. He has **"confined all men in disobedience."** And he said the reason why was **"so that he might be merciful to all."**

God created the world that way for a great purpose. For our failure to live without sin proves the moral and spiritual superiority of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Only he was able to live here without sin. And that qualifies him to be our Redeemer and have supremacy over all things, including all of God's offspring both in heaven and on the earth. For none of them can be proud and boast of equality with Jesus to live a sinless life in a world filled with trials and temptations.

Jesus' sinless life made him fully perfect in his service to his Father, as the book of Hebrews says: **"But we see Jesus who has been made a little something less than the agents, who, because of the suffering of death, has been crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God he would taste of death for every man. For it was fitting for him, through whom are all things, and because of whom are all things, having brought many sons to glory, to make the Pathfinder of their salvation fully perfect through sufferings"** (Hebrews 2:9-10).

Our failure to avoid sin condemns us, but the success of Jesus enabled him to redeem us from that condemnation. And that is how God **“might be merciful to all.”** And that mercy works retroactively to men before Christ, even including Adam. Although Adam lost his eternal sonship with God, he was no doubt able to regain it the way we all do. Which means repenting, trusting God, and committing our lives to his righteousness.

Thus, our sin and redemption were all part of God’s great plan to defeat his enemies, and develop sons for eternity. As Paul said, **“So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through his faith”** (Ephesians 3:10-12).

God knew that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil prematurely would result in the corruption of mankind. Remember, it is not the knowledge of good and evil that corrupts us. It is our inability to keep from using it to sin. Sin deceives us, and by using our knowledge of good and evil, it kills us. It kills us by making us guilty, just as it did with Adam. And the spirit of every man is deceived and condemned that way during the weakness of his youth.

Thus, one purpose of allowing sin to **“become sinful to extreme”** (Romans 7:13). was to defeat God’s enemies. For living in this world of sinfulness to extreme proves that no mere man can live without sin to avoid condemnation. Hence, we all sin and need to be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Those who love and obey him receive that gift of salvation from him, but God’s incorrigible enemies refuse, and so they receive just condemnation. Unrepentant sinners will bear the full punishment of their sins.

I explain more about all those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The unsearchable greatness of God

- **O the depth of wealth, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond finding out!** (Romans 11:33).

God’s great plan of sending his only begotten Son into the world to defeat God’s enemies and to redeem the souls of those who love him from condemnation was kept secret until the time for it to happen. Below are two passages by Paul where he speaks of that:

Now to him who is able to establish you according to my good news, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to a revelation of the mystery that has been kept secret for eternal times, but that was now revealed, and by prophetic scriptures, according to a commandment of the eternal God that was made known to all the nations for obedience of faith, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages. Truly (Romans 16:25-27).

To me, a man less than the least of all the sanctified, this grace was given to preach good news among the Gentiles, the unsearchable wealth of Christ, and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery hidden from the ages in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. So that now the manifold

wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through his faith (Ephesians 3:8-12).

Remember, it was only after Jesus fulfilled his sinless life on the earth by submitting to crucifixion that Satan was cast out of heaven, no longer able to accuse us before God. For the book of Revelation says, **“And she gave birth to a son [Jesus Christ], a male who was going to tend all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was taken up to God and to his throne [after his resurrection]. And the woman [symbolizing God’s righteousness on the earth] fled into the wilderness where she has a place there prepared by God, so that they may nourish her there a thousand two hundred sixty days.**

“And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought. And he did not prevail, nor was a place found for him any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him.

“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death” (Revelation 12:5-11).

God’s way of being merciful to all, by confining all men in disobedience, was indeed a great mystery hidden and kept secret until Jesus fulfilled it. It was a supremely brilliant plan to defeat his enemies, both in heaven and on the earth, and to save the souls of all who love him, all with perfect justice. Therefore, with Paul we can all marvel about **“the depth of wealth, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!”**, and proclaim, **“How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond finding out!”**

Knowing the mind of God

- **For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who became his counselor?**
(Romans 11:34).

Remember what the Lord said about his thoughts and ways compared with ours: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Although we are his offspring and made in his image, he is so much greater than we are it is beyond comparison. No man knows the mind of God except when he reveals part of it, as he has done in the Holy Bible. Even less has any man become his counselor. How could a mere man possible advise him about anything? All we can do is appeal to him, which is what Abraham did when Jehovah said he was going to destroy Sodom (see Genesis 18:20-33).

Yet fools and scoffers continually criticize Almighty God, and proclaim their ways are better than his ways. Nevertheless, they will not be able to deny the truth at the great day of judgment when they will be given the punishment they deserve.

From, through, and for him are all things

- **Or who first gave to him, and it will be repaid to him? Because from him, and through him, and for him, are all things. To him is the glory into the ages. Truly** (Romans 11:35-36).

No creature, whether in heaven or on the earth, can say that God owes them anything. Because all things, whether in heaven or on the earth, are from him, and through him, and for him. And all evil is caused by sin against him. Therefore, it is only good and right and just for us all to say, **“To him is the glory into the ages. Truly.”**

All things are from him because he created all things. All things are through him because it is by the power of his Spirit that all things are sustained. All things are for him because he will always reign supreme. For **“he is Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14). He will always reign supreme because only he is both worthy and capable of reigning. This evil world is an example of what happens when his will is not done.

Present your bodies a living sacrifice

- **I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service** (Romans 12:1).

By the countless mercies of God we owe him everything. Therefore, he alone is worthy of our love and obedience above everything else. It is right for us to commit ourselves totally to him, because our living sacrifice is a reasonable service. It is reasonable because not only do we owe God everything, but he has given us the great hope of living with him in the perfect world of heaven as his sons for eternity. Consequently, we should look forward to heaven, and joyfully sacrifice our selfishness and sinful ambitions in order to serve him.

Presenting our bodies a living sacrifice includes more than simply suppressing our fleshly lusts. It involves sacrificing everything about our worldly lives that would lead us astray from his righteousness. It is a living sacrifice because it means continuing to live and work in this world of tribulation, bear the good fruit of righteousness for him.

It is a living sacrifice because we sacrifice not the lives of our bodies, but their evil appetites and ambitions. And that sacrifice is both holy and acceptable to God. It is holy because it is clean and wholesome, uncontaminated by the filth of sin. It is acceptable to God because that is the kind of life he wants for us.

And with the liberty he has given us, we are free to choose for ourselves how best to live that kind of life; never forgetting that we are all going to be judged by how we use that liberty. As James said, **“So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty”** (James 2:12).

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind

- **And be not conformed to this age, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind, for ye to approve what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God** (Romans 12:2).

The expression “this age” refers to this world. It is called an age because it is a temporary world, as Peter said: **“... the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, being intensely hot, will be disintegrated, and the earth and the works in it will be destroyed by fire”** (Second Peter 3:10).

We should not be conformed to this age because it is an evil age, an evil world. And any man with eyes to see can observe how it is filled with evil. It is filled with evil because of man’s rebellion against the will of God. Therefore, it is very foolish to be conformed to this world of sin and wickedness. Instead, we should be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

God gave us a pure and undefiled spirit at the beginning of our lives. Nevertheless, we inherit a corrupted body because of the sin of Adam. For remember, God said, **“... the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). And Paul said: **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do. ... And those of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and the lusts”** (Galatians 5:17-24). (I explain much more about those things in my book *Becoming Son of God for Eternity*.)

Consequently, the spirit of every man is defiled because we succumb to the temptations of our fleshly lusts. Only Jesus Christ the Son of God kept his spirit undefiled by turning the imagination of his heart away from evil. For the rest of us, however, we need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. We need to reject foolishness and sin, and instead approve **“what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** And the Bible is filled with descriptions of what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Think soundly

- **For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man who is among you, not to over think beyond what he ought to think, but to think so as to think soundly, as God has apportioned to each man a measure of faith** (Romans 12:3).

Since Paul next speaks about having different gifts, then thinking beyond what a man ought to think must mean thinking beyond his abilities. For example, a man thinks beyond what he ought when he tries to lead or to teach when he is not qualified. We should all think in such a way that our thinking is sound. And that takes both a right attitude and good training, as well as a humble spirit.

Paul said we should think soundly as God has apportioned to each of us a measure of faith. But then how does God apportion to each of us a measure of faith? Remember what Paul said about the source of faith: **“So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of**

God” (Romans 10:17). God apportions our measure of faith by how much of his holy word we hear and accept. And that depends not only upon how much he makes available to us, but also upon our receptiveness to it. And with our faith in his holy word and the knowledge we gain from it, we can become wise to think soundly.

One body, many parts

- **For just as we have many body-parts in one body, and all the body-parts have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, and each one body-parts of each other** (Romans 12:4-5).

There is specialization within every complex system. The body of an organism is exceedingly complex. Hence, it serves as a good example of our individual functions within the church. Indeed, Paul said to the disciples at Corinth, **“Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:27).

Paul wrote about that with more detail there. But here he simply gives the lesson that although we do not all have the same function, we still belong to one unified body in Christ. We are **“each one body-parts of each other.”** Therefore, we should not over think beyond what we ought to think. For example, let not selfish ambition disturb the unity of the body by attempting to seize functions that others are better qualified to perform, thinking of ourselves beyond what we ought to think.

Different gifts

- **And having different gifts according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, according to the proportion of faith; or service, in the service; or he who teaches, in the teaching; or he who exhorts, in the exhortation; he who gives, in simplicity; he who leads, in diligence; he who does mercy, in cheerfulness** (Romans 12:6-8).

Although we are one body in Christ we have different gifts, different specialties of function. They are called gifts because they were given to us by the grace of God. For he is the source of every blessing. He gave us life in a very functional and versatile body. And it is ultimately because of him that we have many opportunities to grow and develop. Hence, our different gifts are according to his grace that was given to us.

Paul listed seven kinds of gifts, together with how they should be used:

- Prophecy, according to the proportion of faith.
- Service, in the service.
- Teaching, in the teaching.
- Exhorting, in the exhortation.
- Giving, in simplicity.
- Leading, in diligence.
- Doing mercy, in cheerfulness.

In its broadest sense the word prophecy means speaking on behalf of God, whether about current events or about things of the future. However, popular use of the word now refers

only to foretelling the future, and that gift from God is no longer given. Before the entire Bible was written God inspired men to prophecy directly from him. However, that kind of prophecy no longer exists because it is no longer needed. The Holy Bible now contains the entire word of God for man. Hence, no man now has that gift of prophecy.

Nevertheless, you need to understand the word prophecy, as the Bible uses it, is simply proclaiming the word of God. Therefore, we can still speak of the gift of prophecy among us, as long as we know it does not include any direct revelation from God or the ability to predict the future with perfect accuracy. Every man who is able to proclaim the word of God has the gift of prophecy. (Although no man should make that claim now because of how the world misunderstands the word prophecy.)

Hence, because of that limitation, instead of using the word prophecy as Paul did, I will speak of proclaiming God's word. Thus we should use our ability to proclaim the word of God according to the proportion of our faith. That means the more faith we have, not only will we be better able to learn what God's word says, but we will be better able to proclaim and promote it. Notice how impotent men are about God's word when they have little or no faith in it.

Paul said that the sword of the Spirit was the word of God (see Ephesians 6:17). And the more faith we have in it the better able we are to wield it mightily in our battle for good over evil. Therefore, the gift of proclaiming and promoting the word of God (prophecy in the Bible sense) is in proportion to our faith in it.

The second gift Paul mentioned is service, which refers to helping others. Service can be done in numerous ways depending upon the needs. Virtually every disciple of Christ has the gift of service to some degree or other. We can all help others, but there are some of us who are much better doing it. Hence, we can say they have that special gift.

The third gift Paul mentioned is teaching. It is obvious that people differ in their ability to teach. Some are able to teach individually, but not collectively to groups. Some are able to teach in any circumstance. Teaching is a very vital task, needed to some degree at all times and everywhere. And we should rejoice that God gives some of us that gift.

The fourth gift Paul mentioned is exhorting. Exhorting others means to encourage and motivate them. And that too is a very important function. A man who has an abundance of that gift can sometimes arouse the hearts of people to do remarkable things. One of the characteristics of great leaders is their ability to exhort their people. However, others are more able to exhort individuals rather than groups.

The fifth gift Paul mentioned is giving. And he said giving should be done in simplicity. Remember what Jesus said about giving quietly: **"Be careful not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them, otherwise ye have no reward from your Father in the heavens. When therefore thou do charity, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may have glory by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But when thou do charity, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand does, so that thy charity may be in secret. And thy Father who sees in secret will himself reward thee in the open"** (Matthew 6:1-4).

Giving is not just for the rich and prosperous. Remember the example of the widow whom Jesus praised for her giving, even though what she gave was a very small amount (see Mark 12:42). Giving may be the only thing some people can do, but it is an important part of the functioning of the church.

The sixth gift Paul mentioned is leading. There are indeed large differences in the abilities of people to lead. And because leading can have such a significant effect on the whole group, only the most gifted and best qualified should take on that role. And Paul said leading should be done in diligence. Leading is an honored position with much responsibility. And it should be performed diligently, not selfishly or arrogantly, but with humble diligence.

According to God's plan, the leaders of each congregation are the senior men. Hence, they are called elders and overseers. Paul writes more about them in his other books.

The seventh and last gift Paul mentioned is mercy. This probably refers to helping the sick and the suffering, which can be done in many ways, both physically and mentally. Simply being near them and giving words of encouragement can be very merciful. Paul said mercy should be done in cheerfulness.

Having a gloomy countenance while attempting to help someone who is suffering only adds to their suffering. Beware, however, of showing the wrong kind of cheerfulness. For Solomon said, **"As he who takes off a garment in cold weather, and vinegar upon soda, so is he who sings songs to a heavy heart"** (Proverbs 25:20). That kind of cheerfulness is purely selfish and without mercy. When doing mercy, we must use the kind of cheerfulness that gives comfort and encouragement to those who are suffering, even when we are suffering.

Those seven gifts Paul listed were examples, and should not be considered the only ones useful for the church. Each one of us has some kind of gift according to the grace given to us that we can use for the benefit of God's kingdom. Moreover, many of us are blessed with more than one gift, which we can apply when they would be useful. Nevertheless remember, whatever function we perform, it should be done unselfishly and humbly.

Obey all the virtues

- **Love without hypocrisy, abhorring what is evil, clinging to what is good, with brotherly love toward each other, affectionate, leading each other in recognition, not lazy in diligence, being fervent in the Spirit serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, enduring tribulation, persevering in prayer, sharing for the needs of the sanctified, pursuing love for strangers** (Romans 12:9-13).

In that passage Paul begins to name many important virtues:

Love without hypocrisy.
Abhor what is evil.
Cling to what is good.
Have brotherly love toward each other.
Be affectionate.

Lead others in recognition.
Be not lazy in diligence.
Be fervent in the Spirit serving the Lord.
Rejoice in hope.
Endure tribulation.
Persevere in prayer.
Share for the needs of the sanctified.
Pursue love for strangers.

Paul commanded us to love without hypocrisy. Love is the greatest of the virtues. Remember what Jesus said about the two great commandments in the law: **“Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 22:37-39).

There are many scriptures that teach us about the necessity of love. For example, here is something Jesus said about it to his apostles during the last supper: **“A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other. By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other”** (John 13:35). And our love must always be genuine.

Love has great power. Indeed, the apostle John said that God himself is love: **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16). Therefore, love should be used wisely and righteously. It should never be used with hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is a vice regardless of when and how it is done. It is a kind of deceit where a man pretends to be the opposite of what he is. Jesus often accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. They were very careful to make themselves appear to be the most pious of men, but Jesus exposed them as being among the most sinful of men.

Next Paul commanded us to abhor what is evil. This adulterous generation of Americans does not abhor evil; instead, they glorify it. And they love to watch it happen. Hence, evil is growing and multiplying.

As sons of God, being disciples of Christ, we must abhor evil and let people know we abhor it. We cannot close our eyes to it. But alas, even among many who claim allegiance to Christ they practice the pagan three-monkey philosophy of “Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.”

As disciples of Christ we must **“Fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12). But what should we fight if not evil? And how can we fight it effectively if we do not abhor it? We should hate evil like the deadly plague that it is.

Next Paul commanded us to cling to what is good. Not only must we abhor evil, but we must cling to whatever is good, truly good, good in the sight of God. Notice how Paul said we should cling to it. That means keeping it close and not letting go. By commanding us to cling to what is good, Paul was non-specific. He was non-specific because what is good includes a great many things, much too many to ever list.

All we need is to train ourselves to know what is evil and what is good. And that comes primarily from gaining knowledge and understanding, especially from the word of God.

When we lack knowledge and understanding about some specific things we can also rely upon the counsel of people we trust who do know what is good and they love it.

Paul next commanded us to have brotherly love toward each other. Brotherly love is a special kind of love. For there are different kinds of love. For example, it would not be right for me to love other women with the same kind of love I have for my wife. Moreover, love varies in degree.

Love involves both a feeling and a way of acting. And brotherly love is a special kind of feeling we have toward our brothers in Christ, and also a special way of behaving toward them. It is a love that includes camaraderie or comradeship. It is similar to the kind of love we have for the close members of our family.

Indeed, Paul said we were members of the household of God: **“So then ye are no more alien and foreign, but fellow citizens of the sanctified, and belonging to the household of God”** (Ephesians 2:19). Therefore, we should have brotherly love toward each other.

Next Paul commanded us to be affectionate. Affection is also a special kind of love. It emphasizes emotional warmth and a degree of intimacy. As with every kind of love it should be expressed prudently and appropriately. Nevertheless, we should always be affectionate toward our fellow disciples of Christ, one way or another. For receiving affection from those we love strengthens the bond between us.

Paul next commanded us to lead others in recognition. Recognition involves awareness, but can also include acceptance. Paul seems to be saying that we should serve as examples of recognizing and accepting each other. Be the first to recognize and accept, so that others will follow.

Recognition also strengthens the bond between us. For there is something about being recognized and accepted that draws us together. And Paul says we should lead others in it. Members of the strongest and most dynamic groups are quick to recognize and accept the others of them. Indeed, recognition is a way of expressing affection.

Paul next commanded us to not be lazy in diligence. Laziness involves inactivity when we should be active. People are lazy because they want to avoid the discomfort of labor. Laziness is a vice because nothing of worth can be achieved without labor. And diligent labor can achieve many good things. Therefore, diligence is a virtue we should all practice. Hence, Paul commanded us against being lazy in diligence.

Next Paul commanded us to be fervent in the Spirit serving the Lord. A spirit is energy, and being fervent means having intense emotion. And as we serve our Lord God we should be fervent in the Spirit, his Holy Spirit. Remember what Paul said about the Spirit within us: **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16).

Therefore, we should use the spiritual energy that God has given us to serve him, and use it with both intense and well controlled emotion. We should serve him with zeal, righteous zeal; zeal for whatever is good and right and just. That is the opposite of being committed to laziness. A man who has been energized by intense emotion, and carefully controls it, can do remarkable things, sometimes beyond what he thought he was capable of doing. Nevertheless, our fervency in the Spirit should always be done by degrees, appropriately, and with wisdom.

Paul next commanded us to rejoice in hope. Hope is the desire and expectation for something in the future. Remember what Paul said about it: **“For we were saved to hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. For what is seen, why also hope for that? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait through patience”** (Romans 8:24-25).

Our greatest hope is for us to be sons of God with eternal life in the better world of heaven. And Paul said we were to rejoice in hope. We should rejoice because we have that hope. Indeed, if we remain faithful to the end it is more than hope; it is a guarantee. It is a guarantee because God promised it for us, and his promises never fail.

Paul even told how God gave us his Holy Spirit as a pledge of that promise: **“He also is who put a seal on us, and who gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts”** (Second Corinthians 1:22). Our love of truth and righteousness energized by God’s Holy Spirit within us, is evidence to us that our hope is guaranteed. Therefore, we should rejoice in that hope. Remember what Paul said about it: **“For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us”** (Romans 8:18).

Paul next commanded us to endure tribulation. Suffering tribulations is a necessary part of our eternal salvation. The book of Acts tells of a time when Paul and his companions went about **“strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22).

Remember, Paul even told of taking pride in tribulations because they help give us hope: **“And not only so, but we also take pride in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given to us”** (Romans 5:3-5).

We suffer and groan from our tribulations, but our spirit can rejoice when we set our eyes on the hope we have. Remember what athletes say about the suffering of their physical training: “No pain no gain.”

Next Paul said we should persevere in prayer. It takes faith to persevere in prayer. When we pray we speak to God, but we cannot hear him speak to us. Scoffers consider prayer to be an empty exercise in futility, and for them it is. But for us it is our way of expressing ourselves to our heavenly Father, thanking him and making our petitions. And through faith we look for his response in other ways, such as events that follow (sooner or later) and from words of the Bible that we read.

The Bible contains many examples of the power of prayer. Therefore, we must persevere in it. When James was telling us how to ask God for wisdom, he said, **“But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”** (James 1:6-8).

And remember this passage about Jesus urging us to persevere in prayer: **“And he also spoke a parable to them about it being necessary to always pray, and not to give up, saying, In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God, and did not regard man. And a widow was in that city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of my**

opponent. And for a time he would not, but after these things he said within himself, **Although I fear not God, and regard not man, yet because this widow causes me a beating, I will avenge her, lest by no end of coming she give me a black eye.**

“And the Lord said, Hear ye what the unrighteous judge says. And God, will he, no, not do the vengeance of his chosen who cry out to him day and night, and yet being patient toward them? I say to you, that he will do their vengeance speedily” (Luke 18:1-8).

Next Paul commanded us to share for the needs of the sanctified. Remember, every disciple of Christ has been sanctified. Therefore, the sanctified refer to all Christians. And being part of the body of Christ we must share for the needs of each other. However, nowhere are we commanded *how* to share. We are told when to share; namely when there are needs. But even then we are allowed to use our own judgment.

Our sharing is not dictated to us like the rulers of communist and socialist political systems. We are free to decide what are needs, and when we should share to help with them. And that must be done wisely, both by the one in need and the one who shares. For indiscriminate and inappropriate sharing leads to many evils, as the socialist and communist governments have proven.

There are many different kinds of needs we all have. We all need things for our flesh, such as nourishment and shelter. But we also have needs of the heart and the spirit. For example, those bereaved of a family member need comforting. And we need to share for those needs as well.

Next Paul commanded us to pursue love for strangers. Reference to strangers includes native peoples that are unfamiliar to us, as well as to foreigners. Few people realize that the law of Moses commanded the sons of Israel to love foreigners: **“And if a stranger sojourns with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourns with you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and thou shall love him as thyself, for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God”** (Leviticus 19:33-34).

That law clearly refers to foreigners. However, the Jews have perverted the meaning of that command to say it only refers to the proselytes among them, and not to every foreigner. Nevertheless, the law made no such distinction. There were many foreigners that lived among them who were not proselytes, and they were commanded to love them as themselves. As the law said, the Israelites were sojourners in the land of Egypt. It was not limited to proselytes only.

Remember what Jesus said was the second great command of the law: **“Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 22:39). And a neighbor is a man who lives nearby, regardless of his nationality.

Notice how Paul said we were to pursue love for strangers, pursue it. That means to be active about it. We should go out of our way to show our love for a stranger. Some of my fondest memories were of the times I was treated well when I was a stranger.

For example, several years ago I took a quick trip from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. Since I missed my return bus, the hotel put me on another one. The fare did not cost much, but the bus was old, shabby, and rough riding. Later that night the bus pulled in

at a half way stop on the way where there were many other buses parked. After a while, without my asking, an Asian man took me and my baggage to another much nicer bus that was departing for Singapore, which he had arranged for me—without cost. It all happened so quickly I did not even have time to thank him, but I will never forget that kindness.

All of those things that Paul said we should do were commands of God. For he said in another letter, **“If any man presumes to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge what I write to you, that they are commandments of the Lord”** (First Corinthians 14:37).

Bless those who persecute you

- **Bless those who persecute you. Bless ye and do not curse** (Romans 12:14).

Paul continues these commands of God with this one about responding to those who persecute us. Paul is not speaking about crimes against us. He gives instructions about that a little farther in this book. He is speaking about the many ways people can afflict us that are not illegal. Being insulted, being rejected, having petty slander against us, being unfairly treated, all because we are disciples of Christ, are examples of persecution.

For those who persecute us that way Paul commanded us to bless them and not curse them. However, Paul said farther that crimes against us, including criminal persecution, must be punished by offices of authority.

An example of legal persecution that was severe was Paul’s many attacks against the disciples before he was converted. It was legal because he had the approval of the high priest. However, after Jesus appeared to him in a vision, Paul repented and became himself a disciple. Those are the kinds of persecutors that we are to bless and not curse. One example of blessing them is to pray that God will open their eyes to repent, as he did with Paul (although Christ no longer appears to us in visions).

More virtues

- **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, thinking the same way toward each other, not thinking on lofty things, but accommodating to the lowly. Become not wise according to yourselves, rendering to no man evil for evil, premeditating things right in the sight of all men** (Romans 12:15-17).

Paul added these to his list of important virtues:

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Think the same way toward each other.

Think not on lofty things, but accommodate to the lowly.

Become not wise according to yourselves.

Render to no man evil for evil.

Premeditate things right in the sight of all men.

He commanded us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. We should rejoice and weep together because we are all part of one body. As Paul said to the

Corinthians, **“And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer together, or one part is honored, all the parts rejoice together. Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:26-27).

When we rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep, we show our love for them. For hidden love is cruel, as Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5). Actually, the more we love the more we will want to rejoice with them and weep with them. Indeed, we cannot keep from rejoicing with them and weeping with them.

Paul next commanded us to think the same way toward each other. We should not be partial toward some and indifferent toward others. It is, however, right for us to be partial toward those who belong to us, such as our wives and our children. But we should not be partial within the household of God, the church.

That does not mean, however, that we should treat them all the same. Women are not to be treated the same as men. Children are not to be treated as adults. Those with different gifts are not to be treated as if they all had the same gifts. We are not to be partial or unfairly discriminating. We should think the same way toward each other, rejoicing together and weeping together, and sharing for each other's needs.

Paul next commanded against thinking lofty things, but we should accommodate to the lowly. When Paul commanded us against thinking lofty things, he was not speaking of spiritual things. For he said to the brothers at Colossae, **“Think on the things above, not the things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:2).

What Paul condemned was dwelling on things above us, things that are above our understanding and our abilities. Instead, we should accommodate to the lowly. A modern proverb seems relevant. It says, “Get your head out of the clouds, and keep your feet on the ground.” We should focus on things we know and live with, including ordinary things and persons.

Next Paul commanded us to not become wise according to ourselves. True wisdom can only come from knowing God, his truth, and his righteousness. Men who become wise according to themselves are led astray into all kinds of errors. The discipline of science has become a powerful source of discovering truth about the material realm. And its main guiding principle is the rejection of becoming wise according to themselves, but letting the data from their carefully controlled observations reveal what is true.

Regarding the philosophies of men, which they use to guide their lives, those philosophies are a smorgasbord of toxic ideas full of errors that poison their hearts and their minds. The word of God is the one great light to guide our way out of darkness into the light of righteousness.

As Paul said, **“For ye were once darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And do not associate with the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead even rebuke them”** (Ephesians 5:8-11).

And Peter said, **“But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession, so that ye might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (First Peter 2:9).

Paul next commanded us to render to no man evil for evil. Rendering evil for evil is called vengeance or revenge, which we as individuals are commanded against. As Solomon said, **“Say thou not, I will recompense evil. Wait for Jehovah, and he will save thee”** (Proverbs 20:22). We can desire vengeance (see for examples, Luke 18:3 and Revelation 6:10), but we have no right to apply it ourselves.

Paul shortly quotes a command of the law that says vengeance is for the Lord, he will repay. God will repay because vengeance is justice, and God always upholds justice (ultimately). For the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). He repays in his own time and way. I will say more about vengeance shortly.

Next Paul commanded us to premeditate things right in the sight of all men. We should not only do things right, but also premeditate things right. Responding by impulse is almost always foolish. Wise men premeditate before acting, because good planning is a vital part of every successful endeavor. Therefore, we are commanded to premeditate or think carefully before acting.

And our actions should always be right, not only in the sight of God but also in the sight of all men. For most right things are recognized by all men. Honesty, kindness, lawfulness, industriousness, sincerity, are all examples of things that are right in the sight of all men.

Of course, there are many other things we must do that are right in the sight of God but not in the sight of many men. Believing in God and trusting his holy word, evangelizing the good news of Christ, opposition to things like gambling, abortion, fornication and homosexuality, condemning other religions, are all examples of things that are wrong in the sight of many men. Yet they are right in God’s sight. And as Peter said to the rulers of the Jews, **“We must obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29).

Vengeance is for the Lord

- **If possible from you, keeping peace with all men, not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him to drink. For by doing this thou will heap coals of fire upon his head** (Romans 12:18-20).

Paul commanded us to keep peace with all men. However, he made that command conditional by saying, **“If it is possible from you.”** Keeping peace should be our goal, but only if it is possible from us. Neither Jesus nor any of his apostles taught pacifism. Pacifism guarantees peace by surrendering, which is not what God wants of us.

As Solomon said, **“For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to break down, and a time to build up, a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together, a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to seek, and a time to lose, a time to keep, and a time to cast away, a time to tear, and a time to sew, a**

time to keep silence, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Notice there is never a time for sin and wickedness. Those different things that Solomon did mention will always be acceptable in the sight of God, including a time to hate and a time for war. When there is never any war against evil it becomes victorious. Jesus even gave us a small example when he used physical force to combat evil in the temple.

Remember how the record says, **“And the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found sitting in the temple those who sell oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers. And having made a whip from cords, he drove all out from the temple both the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and turned over their tables. And he said to those who sell the doves, Take these things from here. Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise”** (John 2:13-16).

Paul did command us not to avenge ourselves but give place to wrath. What he meant by giving place to wrath is to restrain our anger and wait for the wrath of God to avenge; wait for the wrath to God. The law of Moses also commanded against taking vengeance: **“Thou shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of thy people, but thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. I am Jehovah”** (Leviticus 19:18).

Paul reference to **“Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord”** is apparently from two different passages. The first part, about vengeance being for the Lord, is from the law of Moses: **“Vengeance is for me, and recompense at the time when their foot shall slide. For the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that are to come upon them shall make haste”** (Deuteronomy 32:35).

The second part, about the Lord repaying, appears to be from this passage in Isaiah: **“Yea, truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. And Jehovah saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor.**

“Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him. And his righteousness, it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head. And he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, wrath to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies” (Isaiah 59:15-18).

The Lord has many ways to avenge and repay. A little farther on Paul tells how God uses offices of authority to avenge wrong doing. About such offices, Paul says, **“For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil”** (Romans 13:4).

Paul’s reference to heaping coals of fire upon the head of your enemy is from the book of Proverbs: **“If thine enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head, and Jehovah will reward thee”** (Proverbs 25:21-22).

Heaping coals of fire upon the head of your enemy is clearly figurative. It means that by helping him in a time of need his conscience will torment him. However, helping him should be done discretely lest it fail to have the right effect. For example, if you overdo it,

he might conclude that you probably deserve his animosity and are trying to buy him off. Applying wisdom in what we do is always relevant.

And remember, we are not to bless criminals. We are to help the offices of authority bring criminals to justice and avenge the evils they commit.

Overcome evil by good

- **Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good** (Romans 12:21).

That is another great passage we should always keep in our memory. For we are always going to be faced with evil of one kind or another, and that passage tells us how to overcome it. Of course, the command is very non-specific. Exactly what kind of good we should use to overcome some particular evil is a matter of using wise judgment. Hence, when faced with some evil, take thought for what particular good would be effective in overcoming it.

Here is a good example of overcoming evil with good in a story from the Old Testament: **“Now the king of Syria was warring against Israel, and he took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou not pass such a place, for the Syrians are coming down there. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of. And he saved himself there, not once nor twice.**

“And the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled for this thing, and he called his servants, and said to them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, No, my lord, O king, but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that thou speak in thy bedchamber. And he said, Go and see where he is that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

“Therefore he sent there horses, and chariots, and a great army. And they came by night, and encompassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an army with horses and chariots was round about the city. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master! What shall we do? And he answered, Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

“And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed to Jehovah, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, This is not the way, neither is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. And he led them to Samaria.

“And it came to pass, when they came into Samaria, that Elisha said, Jehovah, open the eyes of these men that they may see. And Jehovah opened their eyes, and they saw. And, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?

“And he answered, Thou shall not smite them. Would thou smite those whom thou have taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them. And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel” (Second Kings 6:8-23).

Offices of authority

- **Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted (Romans 13:1).**

In the military services each man is required to be subject to the officers who have a higher rank than his. And Paul has commanded that we all be subject to offices of authority that have a higher rank than we have. That is how societies maintain order. Otherwise populations degenerate into anarchy, living like beasts in the wild.

After giving that command, Paul clarifies what he means by an office of authority. For not every ruler is recognized by God as having legitimate authority. The passage says **“there is no office of authority if not by God ...”** That means if an office of authority is not approved by God, then it is not recognized by him. And he only approves offices of authority that support justice and righteousness. For Paul also says, **“... he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God ...”** (Romans 13:2). And no ordinance of God is ever against justice and righteousness.

Paul also said **“the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted.”** What he means is that virtually every office of authority in the world does support justice and righteousness (officially). They condemn commonly recognized evils such as murder, kidnapping, theft, assault, extortion, bribery. Hence, the offices of authority that have been instituted are by God.

That also means God does not recognize any ruler who corrupts his authority, and fails to support justice and righteousness. Remember how Jesus refused to even speak to king Herod when he questioned him. Therefore, we are not obligated to obey a ruler when he fails to promote righteousness. Remember, both Peter and John disobeyed the rulers of the Jews when they opposed God’s righteousness. For example, when the rulers of the Jews commanded the apostles to stop teaching in Jesus’ name, the record says, **“And Peter and the apostles having answered, they said, We must obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29).

Rulers are a source of fear to the evil

- **So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves. For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it (Romans 13:2-3).**

Since offices of authority have been instituted by God (to promote righteousness and oppose evil), then we are to obey them. And he who resists is opposing the ordinance of God. And the consequence of opposing is to receive condemnation. Paul says rulers are not a source of fear to us who do good works, but to men who work evil. For Paul said to the Galatians, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. Against such things there is no law”** (Galatians 5:22-23). We who do right have no fear of rulers because we violate no law.

Moreover, since offices of authority promote righteousness, then when we do good we will have praise from them. And our daily news reports often contain stories of men who were honored by rulers for some particular outstanding good work they did.

Nevertheless remember, there will always be a degree of opposition to us as disciples of Christ by most of those in offices of authority just as they did to Christ, because the devil is the ruler of this world. That opposition to us will vary from mild to severe, and it varies from time to time.

Paul spoke of that to the Christians at Ephesus, when he said, **“Finally my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the full armor of God to enable you to stand against the wiles of the devil. Because our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principal offices, against the positions of authority, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** (Ephesians 6:10-12). I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

He is a helper of God

- **For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil** (Romans 13:4).

Notice how Paul said twice in that passage that the office of authority is a helper of God. Remember how God said that vengeance was for him, and he would repay. As a helper of God, the office of authority applies the vengeance of God with wrath against men who commit evil. Even sinners who occupy offices of authority help God in that way.

Jesus spoke of that, when he said to the multitudes and to his disciples, **“The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do. But do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and difficult to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they do not want to move them with their finger”** (Matthew 23:2-4).

Rulers who do not apply just punishment to criminals are disobedient in their service to God. I see that happening more and more in pagan America, as those who commit serious crimes are either excused with “probation” or are given slight punishment completely inappropriate to the evils they commit. Our judges have made a mockery of justice. Indeed, they no longer try to apply justice because they do not understand what justice is. They treat law and the violations of it as a game of rules to play. One experienced judge wrote a book about it, which he titled *Justice Overruled*. Our modern judges are very poor helpers of God.

Be subordinate and render taxes

- **Therefore there is a need to be subordinate, not only because of the wrath, but also because of the conscience. For because of this ye also fulfill taxes, for they are servants of God being devoted to this same thing. Render therefore to all, the things due: tax to the man of tax, tribute to the man of tribute, fear to the man of fear, esteem to the man of esteem (Romans 13:5-7).**

Paul gave two reasons for us to be subordinate to offices of authority that rank higher. First, to avoid suffering the wrath of God through them. Second, because of the conscience. Our conscience is a very precious thing that should be protected and kept pure because the Holy Spirit uses it to help guide us to live righteously.

Paul spoke about men with defiled minds and consciences, when he wrote these words to Titus: **“Truly to the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and worthless for every good work”** (Titus 1:15-16).

Being servants of God, we must support the offices of authority with our taxes and tributes. We must also render to them proper fear and esteem. We must fear them because of their power to punish. And we must esteem them because of their great responsibilities in their service to God. They serve him by applying justice and righteousness.

If we do not approve how they use our taxes and tributes, we can use whatever rights we have to voice our opinions. If they abuse us and we cry out to God, then God will avenge us in whatever way he judges best. Remember what Jesus said, **“And God, will he, no, not do the vengeance of his chosen who cry out to him day and night, and yet being patient toward them? I say to you, that he will do their vengeance speedily”** (Luke 18:7-8).

Owe no man anything except love

- **Owe no man anything except to love each other, for he who loves the other has fulfilled law (Romans 13:8).**

Paul is not condemning having debts. For example, until a man's wage is paid, it is a debt to him owed by his employer. Debts like that are practical and necessary. Paul is speaking about remaining under obligation to someone that takes away our freedom. Owing a man that way should be avoided.

However, the command Paul gave is like most of the commands of Christ. They are to be applied with good judgment. Remember, we are under the law of liberty. As Paul said, **“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under control by anything”** (First Corinthians 6:12). Therefore, I would not judge a man guilty of sin if he did something like sign a contract to serve some man or some organization for a period of time, such as enlisting in the army.

Love is the one thing we are obligated to each other; that will never end. For it is the fulfillment of law, the law of righteousness. Paul speaks more about that in the next passage.

Love fulfills law

- **For this, Thou shall not commit adultery, Thou shall not murder, Thou shall not steal, Thou shall not testify falsely, Thou shall not covet, and if there be any other commandment it is summarized in this saying, in, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. Love works no evil to the neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of law (Romans 13:9-10).**

The commands Paul listed are all from the ten commandments of the law of Moses. And they all refer to the commandment to love each other. Remember how Jesus summarized the ten commandments. The first summary was from what he called the great commandment: **“Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind”** (Matthew 22:37). The second summary was from what Jesus called the second great commandment of the law: **“Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 22:39).

Remember, Paul said love was the fulfillment of law. Love is fulfillment of law for both God and our neighbor. It is fulfillment of law to our neighbor because love works no evil to the neighbor. Not only does love work no evil to the neighbor, but it also treats him as well as we want to be treated: **“Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself.”** Therefore, when love is applied, there are no other laws that are necessary.

Our salvation is now nearer

- **And this, knowing the time, that the hour is now for us to awake out of sleep. For our salvation is now nearer than when we believed. The night has advanced and the day has approached (Romans 13:11-12).**

The night Paul refers to in that passage is our life in this dark and sinful world, and the day is our afterlife in the bright world of heaven. And since our lives here are so short it behooves us to use our time wisely bearing good fruit in service to God. As James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14). And Jesus said, **“I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night comes when no man can work”** (John 9:4). Therefore, we too must awake out of sleep and do the works of righteousness that God expects of us.

Paul also said those beautiful words about how our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The longer we live the nearer our salvation becomes. Those words are a comfort to me and my wife when we groan about our troubles, especially about our declining health and increased physical weakness and afflictions as we become more elderly.

Works of darkness, weapons of light

- **Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the weapons of light. Let us walk decently as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in beddings and wantonness, not in strife and envy. But clothe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no forethought for lusts of the flesh** (Romans 13:13-14).

The works of darkness are sin and wickedness, which we must cast away from us. The weapons of light are things like truth, righteousness, the good news of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. For Paul said, **“Take ye up the full armor of God, so that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand ye therefore having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet in preparation of the good news of peace.**

“Above all having taken up the shield of faith, by which ye will be able to quench all the fiery darts of evil. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...” (Ephesians 6:13-17).

Paul gave examples of the works of darkness when he mentioned revelry and drunkenness, beddings and wantonness, strife and envy. (Beddings refer to sins of sexual intimacy.) All of those things are condemned by our Lord. They are destructive acts of moral degeneracy. And they are the consequence of forsaking the light of truth for the pleasures of darkness.

But for us who love God with his truth and righteousness, we walk decently in the open, unashamed, and secure in our knowledge of what is good and right. We clothe on our Lord Jesus Christ. That means we imitate his way of life. As Paul said, **“... we look not at things seen, but at things not seen. For things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal”** (Second Corinthians 4:18).

We also make no forethought for lusts of the flesh. We certainly strive to satisfy the needs of our bodies to keep them healthy. But we make no consideration for their lusts, the indulgence of which causes things like revelry and drunkenness.

No arguments about opinions

- **But the man who is weak in the faith, do not receive for arguments of opinions. One man has faith to eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables. The man who eats should not disdain the man who does not eat, and the man who does not eat should not criticize the man who eats, for God has received him** (Romans 14:1-3).

There is nothing wrong about having opinions. It is, however, wrong to argue about them. There is nothing wrong with arguing about important things. Jesus often argued with the Jews about God and his will for us. Arguing is wrong when it is about opinions. Of course, arguing is also wrong when it is done with hostility. Arguing should always be done with calm reason and objectivity, which is how Jesus did it.

Paul gave an example of what we should not argue about when he told about differences in the kinds of things we eat. The law of Moses contained ordinances about foods that were acceptable to eat, and also those that were called unclean, which were forbidden. However, Jesus abolished such restrictions, making all foods clean (see Mark 7:19).

However, there is one exception to that rule about eating anything; namely, eating blood. That will always be forbidden, as stated in these words by the apostles: **“For it was decided by the Holy Spirit, and by us, to lay upon you not one greater burden than these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, keeping yourselves from which, ye will do well. Be strong”** (Acts 15:28-29).

Therefore, it is wrong to criticize anybody about what he eats, unless it is blood. I loath many things people eat, but I have no right to criticize them for it, because God accepts their choices.

God is our judge

- **Who are thou who criticizes the servant of another? To his own lord he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand** (Romans 14:4).

Nobody has the right to criticize how a man serves somebody else. That is the right of the man he is serving, whether for approval or disapproval. And so it is with us and our Lord God. Only he has the right to judge how we are serving him. We can encourage each other and admonish each other, but we cannot criticize each other about how we are serving the Lord. We can criticize each other about other things, but Paul is speaking about criticizing us as servants of God.

God will judge our service to him, whether we stand or fall, whether we are succeeding or failing. And, as Paul said, God is able to make us stand, to make us succeed. For he has many ways to achieve his desires.

Remember the parable about the vine that would not bear fruit: **“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the vine workman, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none. Cut it down, why also waste the ground? And having answered, he says to him, Sir, allow it this year also until I may dig around it and cast manure. Although surely it should bear fruit, and if not, in the coming year thou will cut it down”** (Luke 13:6-9). That parable symbolizes how God uses things to encourage our fruitfulness for him.

God also chastens us when we need it. Remember this passage: **“And have ye forgotten the exhortation that reasons with you as with sons, My son, do not disparage the chastening of the Lord, nor become disheartened when punished by him? For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives”** (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Whatever is done, let it be for the Lord

- **One man prefers one day above another, another man prefers every day. Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He who regards the day, regards it for the Lord. And he who does not regard the day, for the Lord he does not regard it. And he who eats, eats for the Lord, for he expresses thanks to God. And he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat, and expresses thanks to God** (Romans 14:5-6).

Paul gives the example of preferences for particular days. And he makes it very clear that preferences for particular days is strictly a matter of opinion. Nevertheless, we are to be sure in our own minds about such choices for ourselves. But whatever the choice is it should be with regard to the Lord. And that is also true for our choices about food. Whether we eat something or not, we should express our thanks to God. For we owe him everything, even our very lives.

Regarding preferences for particular days, many Christians believe we should still observe the sabbath day, which they claim is now Sunday, the first day of the week. However, there is no support in the Bible for that belief. Indeed, Paul's teachings about the obsolescence of circumcision indicates the sabbath day is also obsolete.

An even stronger belief about particular days is the idea that Sunday is the Lord's day when we are to assemble together in his name. However, there is only one reference in the entire Bible to the Lord's day, and its meaning is not given. It was mentioned by the apostle John, when he said, **"I became in spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a great voice like a trumpet"** (Revelation 1:10).

That is all the Bible says about the Lord's day. It could also have meant the day Jesus was resurrected from the dead. It could have meant the day he ascended into heaven, because after John said those words he had a vision of Jesus from heaven.

I am not condemning the belief that Sunday is the day we assemble together in the Lord's name. I am condemning that belief when those who regard it condemn those who do not regard it. Those who believe it want to make it a law and a commandment. And that is wrong, because it is a tradition based upon an old established opinion.

Nevertheless, I do believe that particular tradition is a good one. Traditions can be bad or good, and the tradition of assembling together on Sunday in the name of Christ is a good one. As long as it is recognized only as a tradition. No Christian should ever condemn another Christian if he fails to join the assembly each and every Sunday.

Nevertheless, regarding our assemblies, we should all hearken to this passage: **"And let us examine each other for provocation of love and good works. Not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as is the habit of some, but exhorting, and so much the more as long as ye see the day approaching"** (Hebrews 10:24-25). We should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Some had developed the habit of not assembling together at all. And the author of Hebrews is condemning that. For how else could we do things like **"examine each other for provocation of love and good works"** if we do not assemble together.

No man lives or dies to himself

- **For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For both if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Both if we live and if we die, therefore, we are the Lord's** (Romans 14:7-8).

It is impossible to live with complete independence, because we are social creatures who are weak and almost helpless when isolated and without anything made or learned from others. But when men work together they can do almost anything. Just consider what mankind has achieved. However, we either belong to the Lord and work for him, or we belong to the world and work for the devil.

As disciples of Christ we both belong to the Lord and we live for him. When we live, it is for him, and when we die, it is for him, because we belong to him. Whatever happens to us, therefore, is for the Lord. It is for him because we belong to him. Consequently, to be faithful to him we must trust and obey him. We must obey his will for us; we must obey his commandments; we must serve him with good fruits of righteousness. And our unity in him gives us great strength.

Because of this Christ both died and arose

- **For because of this Christ both died and arose, and he became alive so that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living** (Romans 14:9).

It was necessary for Christ to die and then arise, so that he could live as our Savior and Redeemer. And as our Savior we belong to him, having been bought by him (see First Corinthians 7:23). Consequently, he is both our Savior and our Lord. He is Lord over both the dead and the living. Christ is Lord over both the physically living and the physically dead, and also the spiritually living and the spiritually dead.

The spiritually dead are those whose bodies are alive but whose spirits are dead in sin. Remember for example, when Paul was giving instructions about widows, he said, **"But the real widow, and made alone, has hoped in God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives"** (First Timothy 5:5-6).

Do not criticize thy brother

- **But why do thou criticize thy brother? Or also why do thou disdain thy brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God.**
- **So then each of us will give account about himself to God. Let us not therefore criticize each other any more, but judge ye this instead, not to place a stumbling block to the brother, or a snare** (Romans 14:10-13).

As long as a man is faithful to the Lord, we should not criticize him, nor should we disdain him. Most criticism and feelings of disdain toward a brother are done in the cowardly way,

meaning indirectly. That kind deserves double condemnation. Gossip is the main avenue for such covert hostility toward a brother. And it grieves my soul that gossip is commonly practiced by many Christians. Criticism by gossip is common, but rarely investigated and eliminated.

But God will judge. For we are all brothers in Christ, and will all stand before his judgment seat. The passage that Paul quoted is from the book of Isaiah, where Jehovah said, **“By myself I have sworn, the word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue will confess to God”** (Isaiah 45:23).

Paul said that **“each of us will give account about himself to God.”** Whether we are a disciple of Christ or not, each one of us will give account about himself to God. Jesus even said, **“But I say to you, that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they will render account about it in the day of judgment. For from thy words thou wilt be justified, and from thy words thou wilt be condemned”** (Matthew 12:36-37).

I say with sorrow that some disciples of Christ will be condemned because of their evil words, including criticizing and disdaining other brothers. Therefore, we should give careful heed to Paul’s warning, and stop criticizing each other.

Instead we should strive to prevent placing any kind of stumbling block to a brother, or a snare, things which might cause him to become discouraged and fall. Jesus commanded us to love each other. Remember how he said, **“By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other”** (John 13:35).

Love reproves, rebukes and exhorts, but it does not criticize or disdain. Neither does love place stumbling blocks or snares before a brother. For Paul said to Timothy, **“I solemnly testify therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is going to judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, stand ready in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”** (Second Timothy 4:1-2).

Nothing is profane by itself

- **I know and am persuaded in Lord Jesus, that nothing is profane by itself, except to him who regards anything to be profane. To that man it is profane** (Romans 14:14).

One of the great blessings of belonging to Christ, is that we are not yoked to a system of laws with God. We are under the law of liberty. Consequently, there are no restrictions on the foods we eat (except for blood). Indeed, Paul said that nothing is profane by itself. Things can become profane by their use, but by themselves are not profane. That means we are free from all restrictions, not just those about foods.

Nevertheless, our liberty must be in accordance to righteousness. Nothing is profane by itself, and we are not limited by restrictions, but we must remain on the narrow and restricted way of life in whatever we do.

Moreover, Paul said that if a man regards anything to be profane, then to that man it is profane. That refers to our conscience, which must never be violated. The way to manage

men who think things are profane by themselves is with teaching. So that they can learn about our liberty in Christ, and God has judged that nothing is now profane by itself for us.

The kingdom is not eating and drinking

- **For if thy brother is distressed because of food, thou no longer walk according to love. Do not destroy with thy food that man for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be maligned. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God, and approved by men.**
- **So then we should pursue the things of peace, and the things of constructiveness for each other. Do not tear down the work of God because of food. All things indeed are clean, but it is wrong to the man who eats through hindrance. It is good not to eat meats, nor to drink wine, nor in whatever thy brother stumbles against, or is caused to stumble, or becomes weak (Romans 14:15-21).**

When we walk in love we will certainly forsake particular kinds of food and drink to prevent causing a brother to stumble. The Christians I have fellowship with believe it is not only necessary to believe in Christ, but we must repent of our sins and be immersed in water for the remission of them. They also believe that only the elders within each congregation have authority to serve as overseers. I agree with those beliefs because that is what the Bible teaches.

Most of them also believe that drinking alcoholic beverages is sinful. That I do not believe, because when Paul was speaking about food and drink, he said, **“All things indeed are clean ...”** Nevertheless, he also said, **“... it is wrong to the man who eats through hindrance. It is good not to eat meats, nor to drink wine, nor in whatever thy brother stumbles against, or is caused to stumble, or becomes weak.”** Therefore, because I love my brothers and I want to obey our Lord, then I will not partake of alcoholic beverages (except rarely for medicinal purposes). What a trivial sacrifice that is!

Notice how Paul said that **“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,”** and, **“he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God, and approved by men.”** Consequently, **“we should pursue the things of peace, and the things of constructiveness for each other.”**

What Paul said in those words is a good summary of what it means to be a Christian. We are not subject to any set of statutes and ordinances with God. He simply wants us to live righteously and peacefully. He also wants us to pursue the things of constructiveness for each other. We should build each other up. We should not tear down the work of God, meaning to cause a brother to stumble or become weak.

Living righteously, and pursuing peace and the things of constructiveness for each other, are how we serve Christ. Moreover, those things are not only approved by God but also by men. For the great majority of men approve our living righteously, peacefully, and constructively.

The Lord also wants us to have joy in the Holy Spirit. God even approves our rejoicing in some worldly things. For Solomon said, **“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God has already accepted thy works. Let thy garments be always white, and let not thy head lack oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou love all the days of thy life of vanity, which he has given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity. For that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor in which thou labor under the sun”** (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9).

However, our great joy should always be our joy in the Holy Spirit. For there is tremendous joy in the knowledge we have of the good news of Christ and the hope it gives us. Indeed, there is no greater joy, because that is the joy of Christ himself. For he said to his apostles at the last supper, **“These things I have spoken to you that my joy may dwell in you, and your joy may be full”** (John 15:11). Our flesh will often groan, but our spirit rejoices with a joy the world cannot experience. Nor can they understand it, because it bewilders them.

Have thy faith before God

- **The faith thou have, have in relation to thyself before God** (Romans 14:22).

Paul has been speaking about our different opinions about foods and about days. But what he said about having our faith in relation to ourselves before God can be applied to many things. There is a basic set of things that every disciple of Christ should believe. However, every one of us has some kind of additional faith in regard to our personal relation to God. For we all have unique lives that we live. And within our lives there are many things we may believe about things that happen that others may not believe.

Therefore, unless what we believe can be verified by scripture or by some other objective evidence, then we should not broadcast what we believe about them. Our faith in them should be in relation to ourselves before God. Otherwise all kinds of errors could be spread, because sometimes our faith about things is misled and will lead others to be misled.

For example, I have heard many people claim that God called them personally to do this or that. However, God no longer does those things. Indeed, such claims are in direct violation of what the Bible teaches. That is especially true of people who claim to have had a vision or who have heard God speak to them. For such things are figments of their own imagination. Never forget what the prophet Jeremiah said about our minds: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt. Who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, beware of believing things about your personal relation before God. Be very cautious about your faith, and protect it against the deceitfulness of your heart.

Everything not from faith is sin

- **Blessed is the man not condemning himself in what he allows. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because it is not from faith, and everything that is not from faith is sin** (Romans 14:22-23).

Our Lord has given us such freedom that there are many things we are allowed to do. Nevertheless, there will always be some things that we might question whether they are acceptable to him or not.

For example, should I visit any of the gambling establishments in places like Las Vegas? I would have no problem with that, because I would go only for observation. I would not gamble because gambling is clearly a sin; it challenges God to take from others and give to you when you do not deserve it. For Solomon said, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah”** (Proverbs 16:33). However, if I thought some fellow Christian would misunderstand why I was there, then I would not go. Or if I thought I would be tempted I would not go.

Any kind of doubt about something being sinful is a warning sign to examine it more closely to make a wise decision about it. And from my own experiences I can tell you that there will be times when such decisions can be difficult. Therefore, the more we know about the word of God the easier we can decide wisely.

Beware however, just because a man may justify to himself some action, that does not make it acceptable to God. Be exceedingly cautious about doing anything that might be considered disapproved by him. For we are going to be judged by everything we do according to his standards not our own.

Bear the weaknesses of the frail

- **Now we the strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the frail, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for what is good toward edification. For Christ also did not please himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell upon me** (Romans 15:1-3).

Paul's uses the word frail in a very broad sense to include everyone in some kind of weakened condition. And it is right and good for the strong to help them in their weakness. Every healthy civilization cares for its weaker citizens. It is a sign of spiritual degeneration and a growing spirit of savagery when they stop caring.

When Paul said **“not to please ourselves”** he clearly meant we should not live selfishly. Selfishness is narrow and divisive. There is no love in selfishness except a love of self. Selfishness erodes the strength of every organization, from families to nations. Increasing selfishness is another reason why more laws that are necessary to control it are being added to the people of America.

There is great strength in unity. And unity is based upon mutual love. Remember what Jesus said about our neighbors: **“Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 19:19). When we love our neighbors we are strengthening our unity. Therefore, we should please our neighbors **“for what is good toward edification.”** To edify is to build up. The word itself is related to the word edifice.

Of course, like everything else, pleasing our neighbors that way should be done wisely, at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Consider this proverb of Solomon: **“He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be considered a curse to him”** (Proverbs 27:14).

Our Lord Christ was completely unselfish. He went about serving God the Father and helping others in their times of need, especially the weaknesses of the frail. God does not expect us to be that self-sacrificing. Indeed, the first thirty years of Jesus' life was spent living in one place as a simple carpenter. And the Bible contains many examples of men who pleased their neighbors for what is good toward edification without bringing themselves to poverty.

The passage that Paul quoted about Christ is from the psalms: **"For the zeal of thy house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach thee have fallen upon me"** (Psalm 69:9). The devil is the one who continually reproached us to God. Remember what they said in heaven about the devil after Jesus was crucified: **"... the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death"** (Revelation 12:10-11).

Jesus allowed himself to be crucified as a criminal so that he could redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. Therefore, the devil's reproaches of us caused Jesus to suffer reproach in the world for our sakes, so that he could save our souls.

Written for our learning

- **For as many things as were written previously were written for our learning, so that through perseverance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope** (Romans 15:4).

Not everything that has been written in the world is for our learning. Indeed, many if not most things that have been written are useless to us. They are for entertainment not learning. Some things that are written are even destructive to our learning, poisoning our minds with things that are corrupt and false.

The many things that were written previously in the holy scriptures were written for our learning, written for the learning of every generation. Knowledge of the word of God helps us to know such things as how to live and persevere in this world of tribulation. It gives us encouragement so that we might have hope. It gives us hope that truth and righteousness will prevail, become victorious, and we will become sons of God for eternity in heaven. That is why the teachings of Christ are called the good news.

That great value of the holy scriptures is another reason why the devil and his disciples strive to destroy trust in the Bible, and discourage us from reading it. Therefore, we should continue studying its words to encourage us and help us persevere so we might have hope.

Think the same way among each other

- **Now may the God of perseverance and of encouragement grant you to think the same way among each other, in accord with Christ Jesus, so that unanimously, with one mouth, ye may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive ye each other, just as Christ also received you for the glory of God** (Romans 15:5-7).

Paul said the words of the Bible were written for our learning, so that through perseverance and through the encouragement of those words we might have hope. And since the words of the Bible were written through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, then he is truly the God of perseverance and of encouragement.

Therefore, we should pray that God will grant us to think the same way among each other. God wants us to be united together. Remember what Jesus said in his prayer during the time of the last supper: **“And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me.**

“And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me” (John 17:20-23).

Our oneness includes thinking the same way, in accord with Christ Jesus. We certainly need not think the same way about everything. But we need to think the same way, in accord with Christ Jesus. That means we need to think the same way about the good news of Christ—what it means and how it must be applied. The many denominations of believers are examples of how they do not think the same way, in accord with Christ Jesus.

The only way we can truly be united in one is in accord with Christ Jesus. That means we must all obey what he taught for us, both from his own words and the words of his apostles that we have recorded for us in the scriptures of the New Testament, all of which are sufficient for our salvation.

The main obstacle to that obedience is the desire of men to pervert its words so they can please the majority of people and follow the errors of the world. Examples are the false teachings that we are saved by faith only, and that women should be granted equal rights with men.

By thinking the same way among each other, in accord with Christ Jesus (in obedience to him), we can **“unanimously, with one mouth ... glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** That way the world may believe that God sent Christ. It is our love for each other and our oneness in him that enables the world to believe that he came from God. When we do not love each other and are not united in oneness, that makes it hard for the world to believe in him. Nevertheless remember, our love and our oneness must always be in accord with him, in accord with his will for us.

Therefore, we must receive each other, just as Christ also received us for the glory of God. We must apply our love to each other, and strive for that oneness. Partiality, gossip, clanishness, backbiting, quarreling, indifference to others, and other such things should never be a part of our lives together.

Christ became a helper of all men

- **And I say, Christ Jesus became a helper of men of circumcision, for the sake of God's truth (in order to confirm the promises of the fathers), and the Gentiles, for the sake of mercy, to glorify God, as it is written, Because**

of this I will give thanks to thee among Gentiles, and will sing to thy name. And again he says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise ye the Lord all nations, and let all the peoples praise him. And again, Isaiah says, There will be the root of Jesse, and he who arises to reign over Gentiles. In him Gentiles will hope (Romans 15:8-12).

Christ was the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the forefathers of the nation of Israel. The race of the Hebrews began with Abraham. And God promised him not only a great nation, but also that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. And those promises were passed down to Isaac and Jacob. Jacob (later called Israel) was the father of the twelve tribes from which came the nation of Israel. Christ was the seed of Abraham that fulfilled God's promise to bless all the families of the earth.

Christ also became a helper of the Gentiles for the sake of mercy, to glorify God. In that way the whole world would be blessed and bring glory to God far beyond the nation of Israel.

Here are the Old Testament passages that Paul quoted about the Gentiles being blessed: **"Therefore I will give thanks to thee, O Jehovah, among the Gentiles, and will sing praises to thy name"** (Psalm 18:49); **"Rejoice, O ye Gentiles, with his people"** (Deuteronomy 32:43); **"O praise Jehovah, all ye Gentiles, laud him, all ye peoples"** (Psalm 117:1); **"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, and he who arises to rule over the Gentiles. In him shall the Gentiles hope, and his resting-place shall be glorious"** (Isaiah 11:10). Notice how knowledgeable Paul was of the Old Testament. And he often quoted passages from it to verify what he was teaching.

All joy and peace in believing

- **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, for ye to abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit** (Romans 15:13).

Our heavenly Father is the God of hope because it is only through him that we have genuine hope. For remember what Solomon said about this life: **"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?"** (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3). For we all perish in this world, losing everything.

Therefore, it is only through God and Christ that we can have real hope. And that hope is for a better life in a better world as sons of God for eternity. Therefore, we must endure, persevere, and overcome the trials and temptations of this life, remaining faithful to the end. For as the author of the book of Hebrews said, **"Let us hold firm the affirmation of the hope unwavering, for he who promised is faithful"** (Hebrews 10:23).

Paul called for the God of hope to fill us with all joy and peace in believing. We will not be filled with all joy and peace in our flesh. For remember, this is a life of tribulation. We will be filled with all joy and peace in our believing. That means by believing in our beloved heavenly Father we can have all joy and peace in our spirits.

When we put our faith in him our flesh may groan but our spirit will have joy and peace. And that will enable us to abound in hope, the hope we have from the great promises of

God. For our hope is in the power of the Holy Spirit. That means by having the Holy Spirit within us we are able to have that hope. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit within us that our hearts abound in hope.

The world cannot have that hope because the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of truth): **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). What Jesus said to them with those words he also said to us, because those words apply to all of his disciples.

Full of goodness and knowledge

- **And I also myself am persuaded about you, my brothers, that ye yourselves are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish others** (Romans 15:14).

Paul did not say he knew they were full of goodness and filled with all knowledge. He said he was persuaded of that. He was obviously persuaded of them by their behavior, by their good fruits and righteous deeds, not by mere talk. And that was a deserved compliment for them, not flattery. For the Bible condemns flattery as deceit.

Saying they were filled with all knowledge no doubt meant they had all the knowledge they needed of the good news of Christ to live righteous lives in the sight of God. For no man has all knowledge. Also Paul did not say they were filled with all understanding of the good news. They did not need to understand fully, because they had the knowledge they needed to live right and the faith to apply it. And that is true of us all.

Since the Roman disciples had those things, Paul was therefore persuaded they were also able to admonish others. They had all the knowledge they needed and were full of goodness. Hence, they were fully qualified to admonish others. An admonition is a strong warning. And every man needs to be warned about the dangers of sin and the judgment to come. Jesus often admonished his disciples to be ready for that great day.

Paul a minister of Christ to the Gentiles

- **But I wrote more boldly to you, brothers, in part, as reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, for me to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, serving the good news of God like a priest, so that the offering up of the Gentiles might become acceptable, being sanctified in the Holy Spirit** (Romans 15:15-16).

Paul wrote many things in this letter that are difficult to understand. They require the reader to be spiritually mature, capable of intellectual meat and not needing milk only. The need for milk only was the case at Corinth, because he said to congregation there. **“And I, brothers, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, as to the childlike in Christ. I gave you milk to drink and not solid food, for ye were not yet able. But not even yet are ye able ...”** (First Corinthians 3:1-2).

The brothers at Rome were capable of solid foods. Therefore, Paul wrote to them more boldly, in part. He wrote more boldly in part because not everything in the letter is difficult to understand. They knew those things, but he wrote as reminding them. We all need reminding from time to time about all of the things taught in the word of God.

Paul was able to write more boldly to them because of the grace that was given to him by God. That grace was his selection to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. It enabled him to serve the good news of God like a priest. Paul was not an ordinary preacher of the good news. He was chosen by Christ to be an apostle, with all the rights and privileges of an apostle. Which meant he could proclaim the word of God with authority, because he had been sanctified in the Holy Spirit. And the books that Paul wrote were all inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Paul therefore, strove to serve like a priest, being a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, so that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable. Paul worked to keep the Gentiles in the faith, giving them knowledge of the word of God, and encouraging their obedience. The priests of the law of Moses made offerings to God. And since Paul served the good news of God like a priest, he wanted his offering to be acceptable, which offering was the faithfulness of the Gentiles.

Paul's work for Christ

- **I have therefore a boast in Christ Jesus in things toward God. For I will not dare to speak anything of which Christ did not accomplish through me for the obedience of Gentiles, by word and work, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of a Spirit of God, so that for me, from Jerusalem and all around as far as Illyricum, to fully preach the good news of Christ** (Romans 15:17-19).

Paul's boast in Christ Jesus in things toward God were the accomplishments of Christ for the obedience of Gentiles, which Christ achieved through Paul. Paul was boasting that Christ used him to accomplish the obedience of Gentiles. And that was indeed a worthy boast. As Paul said the Corinthians, **"But he who boasts should boast in the Lord"** (Second Corinthians 10:17).

Christ used Paul for the obedience of Gentiles (1) by word and work, (2) in the power of signs and wonders, and (3) in the power of a Spirit of God. Paul both preached the word of God and he lived it, using himself as an example of obedience to the good news of Christ. He did those things in many different ways, just as we too should do them as we have opportunities.

Paul also used the power of signs and wonders, which genuine powers only come from God. Remember this report to the apostles and elders at the conference in Jerusalem: **"And all the multitude kept silent, and they heard Barnabas and Paul describing how many signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through them"** (Acts 15:12). The book of Acts describes many of those signs and wonders.

The power of a Spirit of God enabled Paul to both perform signs and wonders, and also to speak and write by divine inspiration. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit, which was sent to him by Christ, that Paul was able to accomplish the obedience of the Gentiles.

Christ was the one who accomplished their obedience, but he did it through Paul. Therefore, Paul could justifiably boast about those accomplishments.

Paul said he did that beginning from Jerusalem. That indicates Paul also converted some Gentiles there as well as Jews. Illyricum was a Roman province north of Macedonia. It was east of Rome across the Adriatic Sea. Paul preached to many places between Jerusalem and Illyricum, proclaiming the good news of Christ.

Paul's aspiration in proclaiming Christ

- **And thus having aspired to proclaim the good news not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build upon a foundation belonging to another man, but, as it is written, They will see to whom it was not reported about him, and they will understand who have not heard** (Romans 15:20-21).

Paul aspired to proclaim the good news to places that had not yet heard it. He did not want to work to build up the congregations that other men started. It was his goal to bring the good news of Christ to as many Gentiles as he was able. And that meant spending his time in areas not yet converted.

The Old Testament passage that Paul quoted from is this one: **“Behold, my servant shall deal wisely. He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him. For that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall understand”** (Isaiah 52:13-15).

Paul did go to Jerusalem later in his life to appeal to the Jews. However, he was rejected by them, imprisoned by the Romans, and eventually sent to Rome. Remember, the Holy Spirit had warned Paul about trying to convert the Jews in Jerusalem.

God had give Paul special permission to go to Jerusalem because Paul desperately wanted to save at least some of the Jews there. Nevertheless, he was warned by the Holy Spirit that he would be rejected and placed in bondage (see Acts 21:4 and 10-14). Yet his love for his countrymen, his fellow Israelites, was so great that he was willing to suffer anything in an effort to save some of them.

His desire to see them

- **Therefore also, I was delayed these many times coming to you. But now, having no more place in these regions, and having a great desire from many years to come to you, whenever I go to Spain I will come to you. For I hope to see you while passing through, and there to be helped on the way by you, if first I may be partly satisfied from you** (Romans 15:22-24).

Paul suffered many obstacles in his efforts to proclaim Christ. Therefore, many of the things he planned were either delayed or prevented. When Paul said there was no more place in these region, he did not specify where he was. Therefore, we can only conjecture.

However, most Bible scholars believe he was at Corinth when he wrote this book. Remember, Corinth was in Greece.

Paul said he not only wanted to see them and be partly satisfied from them while passing through to Spain, but he also wanted to be helped by them on the way to Spain. However, there is no Bible record that Paul ever went to Spain. And the various theories that men have offered about it are only conjectures, because there is no sure evidence he was ever there.

Paul only mentions going to Spain in this book, and it was written several years before he came to Rome. Moreover, from what Paul said it is obvious he thought he would be free to travel farther after he came to Rome. However, when he did come to Rome he remained in bondage by the Roman government. And the book of Acts says he was in Rome for **“two whole years”** (see Acts 28:30). The book of Acts says nothing about him ever being released from that bondage. He was probably put to death there after those two years.

Therefore, in my judgment Paul never went to Spain because it was not the will of God for him. We all have the desire to do certain things in the future. However, our Lord God decides what we will do. Remember what the book of Acts says about Paul first wanting to go to Asia: **“But having passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia ...”** (Acts 16:6).

Taking a gift from the Gentiles to Jerusalem

- **But now I am going to Jerusalem serving the sanctified. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain participation for the poor of the sanctified at Jerusalem. For they were pleased** (Romans 15:25-27).

Macedonia and Achaia were Roman provinces, but are now part of modern Greece. Both Philippi and Thessalonica were in Macedonia, while Athens and Corinth were in Achaia. And there were other congregations in those two Roman provinces. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks of such aid to the poor disciples at Jerusalem (see Second Corinthians 8-9). And modern disciples continue to send aid to the needy of the disciples in other places.

Notice how Paul said the disciples in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased. They were pleased to make a certain participation for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. They were pleased because they had a generous heart.

Remember what Paul said about them to the Corinthians: **“And, brothers, we declare to you the grace of God that has been given in the congregations of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy, even from the depth of their poverty, abounded for the wealth of their generosity, so that according to their ability, I testify, and beyond their ability, willingly, with much exhortation, begging of us the favor, even the fellowship of service for the sanctified”** (Second Corinthians 8:1-4). Those righteous souls had an abundance of joy, considered the opportunity for their sacrificial giving to be a favor to them.

Sharing for fairness

- **And they are debtors of them, for if the Gentiles were partakers in their spiritual things, they are obligated also to serve them in the carnal things** (Romans 15:27).

The disciples in Macedonia and Achaia were also probably pleased because it gave them an opportunity to do something for the Hebrew Christians. They no doubt knew that Christ had been a Hebrew, and that the Holy Bible had been entirely written by Hebrews.

Therefore, as Paul said, the Gentiles were debtors of the Hebrews for those things. And since the Gentiles owed so much to them of spiritual things, it was only just for them to make some kind of material contribution to the Hebrews in a time of their need. Indeed, Paul said they were obligated to serve them that way.

Paul will come to them

- **Having therefore completed this, and having sealed this fruit for them, I will depart by you to Spain. And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of the good news of the Christ** (Romans 15:28-29).

Paul said that after delivering their gift to the poor of the sanctified at Jerusalem **“I will depart by you to Spain.”** Nevertheless, there is no Bible record of Paul ever taking such a trip to Spain.

Paul also said to them, **“... when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of the good news of the Christ.”** When Paul did come to them he was being held in bondage. Also on the voyage there he had to endure a terrible storm at sea that lasted two weeks. Yet Paul prophesied he would come in the fullness of the blessing of the good news of the Christ.

Our true blessing is spiritual not material. And even though Paul was in bondage at Rome, he was still able to promote Christ fully. For the last part of the book of Acts says, **“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired lodging. And he received all who came in to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, without hindrance”** (Acts 28:30-31).

He asks prayers for success in Jerusalem

- **Now I beseech you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive with me in prayers to God for me. So that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may become acceptable to the sanctified, so that I may come to you in joy through the will of God, and be rested with you** (Romans 15:30-32).

Paul besought his Christian brothers in Rome to strive with him in prayers to God for him. He wanted them to strive in prayers to God so that (1) he may be rescued from those who

are disobedient in Judea, and (2) his service for Jerusalem may become acceptable to the sanctified, his fellow disciples of Christ.

The prayers that he be rescued from the disobedient in Judea were answered. Although Paul was viciously attacked by the unbelieving Jews in the temple area and they tried to kill him, the Roman soldiers rescued him from them (see Acts 21:31).

Paul also wanted his service for Jerusalem to become acceptable to the disciples. For Jewish Christians were suspicious about Paul's faithfulness. Remember what the record says about Paul's arrival at Jerusalem: **"And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And having greeted them, he reported one by one what God did among the Gentiles through his ministry."**

"And when the men heard, they glorified God, having said to him, Thou see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed, and they are all zealots of the law. And they were informed about thee, that thou teach all the Jews throughout the nations desertion from Moses, telling them not to circumcise the children nor to walk by the customs. What is it therefore? Certainly the multitude needs to get together, for they will hear that thou have come" (Acts 21:18-22).

Before Paul was attacked in the temple he proved he was still faithful to the law as a citizen of Israel. Which meant the prayers that his service for Jerusalem might become acceptable to the sanctified were also answered. Therefore, Paul was able to come to the Romans in joy through the will of God.

The record shows that he was also rested with them while he was there, even though he was in bondage. Remember, the book of Acts tells how the disciples at Rome went down the coast to meet him on his way to Rome: **"And from there the brothers, who heard these things about us, came for a meeting with us as far as Appius Forum and The Three Taverns, whom, when Paul saw, having expressed thanks to God, he took courage"** (Acts 28:15).

When requesting the brothers in Rome to strive in prayers with him, the text says Paul besought them **"by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit ..."** Beseeching them by our Lord Jesus Christ meant he was appealing to them as joint subjects of the Lord. They were all fellow disciples of Christ, which meant they were committed to love and support each other.

Paul also besought them by the love of the Spirit. That is the only time the expression **"the love of the Spirit"** is used in the Bible, and its meaning is not clear. Paul probably meant their love for the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. By having the love of the Spirit in their hearts they would joyfully agree to strive with him in prayers to God for him.

The God of peace

- **And the God of peace is with all of you. Truly** (Romans 15:33).

All of the other translations of the New Testament (that I know about) say "peace be with you" instead of "peace is with you." That sentence by Paul is one of many in the original Greek text that has no verb. It literally says, **"And the God of peace with you all,"** which

makes it an incomplete sentence in English. Hence, translators add “be” or “is” to provide the required verb.

I chose to use the verb “is” because Paul did not need to hope that God would be with them; God already was. For remember what Paul said about them: **“And I also myself am persuaded about you, my brothers, that ye yourselves are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge ...”** (Romans 15:14). How then could God not already be with them? Paul was not calling for God to be with them. He was reminding them of the fact that God was with them.

Paul referred to God as the God of peace. God has many attributes. For example, he is also called the God of all encouragement (see Second Corinthians 1:3), the God of love (see Second Corinthians 13:11), the God of all grace (see First Peter 5:10), the God of justice (Malachi 2:17). I describe the nature of God in much more detail in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

God is the God of peace because he is the ultimate source of peace. Indeed, there can be no peace without God. The lack of peace is always caused by sin, which is disobedience to the will of God. Conflict and strife will always exist where sin is tolerated. Therefore, be not foolish and blame God for the evil consequences of conflict and strife. He will end those things at the end of the world, which will be after he has given us all the opportunity to become his sons for eternity.

Sister Phoebe

- **Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe who is a helper of the congregation at Cenchreae, so that ye may welcome her in the Lord worthily of the sanctified, and that ye provide for her in whatever matter she may have need of you, for she also became a helper of many, and of me myself** (Romans 16:1-2).

Cenchreae was a small harbor town just east of Corinth. Phoebe is only mentioned in this one passage of the Bible. Paul called her a helper. Some versions say she was a deaconess, but they err. The Greek word for helper DIAKONOS is transliterated deacon. In my version I translated that word instead of simply transliterating it. Otherwise it would be misleading, suggesting that Phoebe was an office holder in the congregation.

Qualifications for the designated helpers in each congregation were given by Paul in his first letter to Timothy. Part of those qualifications included these words: **“Let helpers be husbands of one wife, ruling children and their own houses well”** (First Timothy 3:12). Nothing is said about women being qualified to the special office of helper. Women can certainly serve as helpers in various ways, but not in any kind of official capacity. The Bible does not justify an office of deaconess.

Women are always to be subservient and serve in the background, just as wives are to be subservient to their husbands and serve him in the background, and just as the women who went with Jesus were subservient to the men and served in the background.

In modern times it is a very rare woman who conforms to her God-given role that way. Consider this example of how Abraham’s wife Sarah remained in the background: **“And**

Jehovah appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him.

“And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and strengthen ye your heart. After that ye shall pass on, inasmuch as ye came to your servant. And they said, Do so as thou have said.

“And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes. And Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to the servant. And he hastened to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree, and they ate.

“And they said to him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return to thee when the season comes round, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him.

“Now Abraham and Sarah were old, *and* well stricken in age. It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I have become old shall I have pleasure, my lord also being old? And Jehovah said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I who am old certainly bear a child? Is anything too hard for Jehovah? At the set time I will return to thee, when the season comes round, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. And he said, No, but thou did laugh” (Genesis 18:1-15).

Peter also said about Abraham and Sarah, “For this way formerly also, the holy women, trusting in God, adorned themselves, being subordinate to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children ye became, doing good, and not being afraid of anything fearful” (First Peter 3:5-6). In modern times it is also very rare for a woman to refer to her husband that way.

Phoebe would herself no doubt have denied having any kind of official office in the congregation. Paul described her as a helper of many, including himself. Many serve as helpers within congregations, but are not appointed to an office.

Paul commended Phoebe, and asked the brothers at Rome to welcome her worthily of the sanctified. He also asked that they provide for her in whatever matter she might have need of them. She was a trustworthy servant of Christ, and only needed resources to be fruitful.

Remember the example of Dorcas: “Now at Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, being translated, is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charities that she did. And in those days, having been ill, she happened to die. And after washing her, they laid her in an upper chamber. And since Lydda is near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter is in it, they sent two men to him, exhorting him not to delay to go through to them. And after rising, Peter went with them, whom, after coming, they brought into the upper chamber. And all the widows

stood by him weeping, and exhibiting the coats and garments, as many things as Dorcas made being with them” (Acts 9:36-39).

And we need to welcome and help provide for the needs of productive servants like Phoebe and Dorcas, as they serve to help other disciples.

Aquila and Priscilla

- **Salute Prisca and Aquila my co-workmen in Christ Jesus (who laid down their own neck for my life, to whom not only I thank, but also all the congregations of the Gentiles), and the congregation associated with their house (Romans 16:3-4).**

Remember, the book of Acts mentions several times how Prisca and Aquila worked with Paul and serve the Lord in other ways. How they laid down their own neck for Paul is not told. They spend a lot of time with him, and no doubt experienced some of the persecutions against him. That may be what Paul meant by their laying down their own neck for his life. They allied themselves with him, and were willing to risk their lives to help the life of Paul in his service to Christ.

Paul said that all the congregations of the Gentiles were also thankful to them. They were all no doubt thankful for how they served Paul, because Paul served all the congregations of the Gentiles. And we too are thankful for people like Aquila and Prisca (also called Priscilla) because of their service to the cause of Christ. Especially because so much of the New Testament was written by Paul, who was served by them.

Notice how Paul said there was a congregation associated with their house. The Bible mentions how disciples assembled as congregations in people's houses. It says nothing about disciples purchasing property to build church buildings like the synagogues of the Jews. However, that does not mean it is wrong. Our Lord has given us much liberty, and church buildings are certainly acceptable. There are advantages and disadvantages both to congregations meeting in houses, and to congregations meeting in their own buildings.

Salute various disciples

- **Salute Epaenetus my beloved who is the first fruit of Achaia for Christ.**
- **Salute Mary who labored many things for us.**
- **Salute Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners who are notable men among the apostles, who also became in Christ before me.**
- **Salute Ampliatus my beloved in the Lord.**
- **Salute Urbanus our co-workman in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.**
- **Salute Apelles, a man reliable in Christ.**
- **Salute the men from those of Aristobulus.**
- **Salute Herodion my kinsman.**

- **Salute the men from those of Narcissus who are in the Lord.**
- **Salute Tryphaena and Tryphosa, the women who labor in the Lord.**
- **Salute the beloved Persis who labored many things in the Lord.**
- **Salute Rufus the chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.**
- **Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them.**
- **Salute Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the sanctified with them** (Romans 16:5-15).

A salute is a greeting, and it can vary in different ways. Military forces most frequently use some kind of a raised hand for a salute. However, just about any way to greet a person can be called a salute, including with a kiss or a handshake.

There are twenty-four names mentioned in that list. Since Paul had not yet been to Rome there is the question of how he knew all those people. It is very doubtful that those twenty-four were the only members of the congregation in Rome. Perhaps during all of his travels he had occasion to meet those disciples in other places.

Of all the names listed only Mary, Rufus, and Hermes are mentioned elsewhere. Mary was a very popular name in those times. That name is mentioned fifty-four times in the New Testament. Six different women are named Mary: (1) Mary the mother of Jesus, (2) Mary the mother of John Mark, (3) Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, (4) Mary the mother of James and Joses, (5) Mary Magdalene, and (6) Mary the woman that Paul mentioned here in this book as having labored many things for them.

Paul called Epaphroditus his beloved who was the first fruit of Achaia for Christ. He was probably converted at Athens during Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul said that Epaphroditus was his beloved. There are three other men in that list that Paul said were his beloved: Ampliatus, Stachys, and Persis. He could not have meant that the others were not his beloved. He may have meant they had spent more time with him and developed a stronger relationship. We love all of our brothers in the Lord, but we each develop closer relationships with a few of them, just as Jesus did with his apostles. Remember how there were times when he chose only Peter, James, and John to go with him somewhere.

Paul called both Andronicus and Junias his kinsmen and his fellow prisoners. How they were related to him is not told. How long it was before Paul was converted that they became in Christ is not told either. All such things are irrelevant trivia. Paul also said that Herodion was his kinsman.

What Paul meant by being fellow prisoners may be that they had been imprisoned with him at some time. Paul does not appear to have been in bondage when he wrote this book. And he certainly would not have sent a greeting to Andronicus and Junias if they were in bondage with him.

Paul also said they were notable men among the apostles and became in Christ before he did. Since they were not chosen apostles of Christ, what Paul meant was that among the

apostles both Junias and Herodion were notable men. That means they were outstanding in their service and were held in high esteem by the apostles. Since they were kinsmen of Paul that meant they were also Jews. Hence, the apostles would have known them better.

Paul said Urbanus was **“our co-workman in Christ.”** That must mean Urbanus had worked together with Paul and his companions for a while before going to Rome. Remember, the Bible record is necessarily condensed, with many things omitted. Urbanus’ work with Paul and his companions (and the work of many others) was just not recorded.

Paul called Apelles a man reliable in Christ. Reliability is a great virtue, especially reliability as a disciple of Christ. God is completely reliable, and he expects us to be reliable in our services, especially those to him.

The men from those of Aristobulus may have been members of his family. Or perhaps they were members of some business or some other organization he was a member of. Whatever it means they were associated with him in some special way.

Paul said the same thing about the men from those of Narcissus, except he added **“who are in the Lord.”** That was probably also true of the men from those of Aristobulus. For why would he send a greeting to those who rejected Christ?

Paul next mentions two women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, whom he said labored in the Lord. Remember, he also said that Mary labored many things for them. Paul may have mentioned the labors of those three women because they were notable in their work. People differ in many things they do, including disciples of Christ. And some labor more than others in the work of the Lord, whatever it may be.

Paul not only said that Persis was beloved, but he also said he too labored many things in the Lord. His much labor must also have been a distinguishing characteristic of Persis.

Next Paul mentioned Rufus, whom he said was the chosen in the Lord. We who are disciples of Christ are all chosen in the Lord. Remember what Peter said about us: **“But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for an acquired possession, so that ye might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (First Peter 2:9).

However, Rufus was probably chosen for some special service. Remember, the Holy Spirit chose Barnabas and Paul to take the good news of Christ to Gentile nations. Nevertheless, no man now has the right to claim he was chosen in some special way in the Lord. Over the centuries God had chosen particular men in special ways. However, those days have passed. We now have the entire word of God plus the law of liberty for ourselves.

I have heard many men claim that God called them or chose them for some special work, but they are either deceived or are deceiving. We are now under the law of liberty, and we are the ones who choose what we will do. Paul said about himself, **“For if I preach the good news, it is not a source of pride for me, for an obligation is laid upon me. And woe is to me if I do not preach the good news”** (First Corinthians 9:16). He said those words because the Lord had chosen him for that work. But now no man is under obligation to the Lord to do any kind of specific work or service. God no longer calls individual men that way. He calls all of us through the holy scriptures.

Paul also said that the mother of Rufus was his mother. However, that obviously means she was his mother in the sense of treating him like her own son. She was like a mother to him, and he recognized and appreciated it.

The only other reference we have to a man named Rufus is when Jesus was crucified. The record says, **“And when they had mocked him, they took the purple garment off of him, and dressed him with his own garments. And they lead him out so that they might crucify him. And they draft a certain Simon, a Cyrenian passing by coming from the countryside, the father of Alexander and Rufus, so that he would take his cross”** (Mark 15:20-21). However, that particular Rufus was probably not the same one that was a member of the congregation at Rome.

Paul next mentions **“Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them.”** We know nothing more about any of them. Hermes was the name of a god of Greek mythology. Remember what Acts says about Hermes: **“And a certain man was sitting in Lystra, disabled in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s belly, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul speaking, who, having gazed at him, and having seen that he has faith to be healed, said with a great voice, Stand correctly on thy feet. And he leaped up and walked. And the multitudes who saw what Paul did, lifted up their voice, speaking Lycaonian, The gods came down to us, having become like men. And they actually called Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the man who led the word”** (Acts 14:9-12).

Why that Christian in Rome was named Hermes is not told. We are all named by our fathers and mothers when we are born. They may have been idolaters who wanted to honor that particular god. However, that faithful disciple forsook idolatry and followed the one true and living God.

Paul then mentioned four other men. He also mentioned the sister of one of them, but not by name. After which Paul asked the disciples to salute **“all the sanctified with them,”** which left out nobody there, because we are all sanctified in the Lord.

Salute each other with a holy kiss

- **Salute each other by a holy kiss. The congregations of Christ salute you** (Romans 16:16).

Christians should greet each other because we are all part of the body of Christ. Greetings show recognition and approval. They are a gesture to encourage our unity. When Paul said the congregations of Christ saluted the disciples in Rome, that meant they recognized and approved of them.

When Paul said for us to salute each other by a holy kiss, he was not commanding that we always greet each other literally with a kiss. And notice how he qualified the kiss by saying it must be a holy kiss. In other words, when we do greet each other literally with a kiss, it must always be a holy kiss. That means it should never give the appearance of being anything but pure and honorable.

Greeting people literally with a kiss is a tradition in some places. However, in America it is much more common and acceptable to greet by grasping right hands. Actually, if I

began greeting people here with a kiss it would rarely be received with approval, even among fellow Christians.

Beware of anything contrary to the doctrine

- **Now I beseech you, brothers, watch out for those who make the divisions and the stumbling blocks, contrary to the doctrine that ye learned, and turn away from them. For such kind serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly** (Romans 16:17-18).

Making divisions and stumbling blocks among believers is wrong when it is contrary to the genuine doctrine of the good news of Christ. Remember how Jesus prayed for our oneness during the last supper with his apostles (see John 17:20-23). Paul also said these words about our oneness to the Ephesians: **“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, call on you to walk worthily of the calling in which ye were called, with all humility and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing each other in love.**

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, one body, and one spirit. Just as also ye were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all. He is over all, and through all, and in us all” (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Nevertheless, there must be some kind of division when there is error. For Paul also said to the Corinthians, **“For indeed first, when ye come together in a congregation, I hear divisions are present among you, and I partly believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that the genuine may become apparent among you”** (First Corinthians 11:18-19). Truth cannot be united with error. Therefore, divisions are necessary when error develops. However, the goal is always unity according to the genuine doctrine of the good news of Christ.

Regarding the stumbling blocks, there are many things that can become stumbling blocks. Demanding that traditions become laws is a stumbling block. Setting one man above all the rest (like the office of Bishop) is a stumbling block. Tolerating error of any kind is a stumbling block.

Paul warned us to watch out for those who make the divisions and the stumbling blocks contrary to the genuine doctrine of Christ, and turn away from them. Those who make those things do not have noble motives. They do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly. That means they serve their own worldly welfare, not the welfare of Christ and his church.

Deceiving the hearts of the naive

- **And by their smooth words and elegant speech they deceive the hearts of the naive** (Romans 16:18).

There is great power in words. Indeed, Solomon said, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it shall eat the fruit of it”** (Proverbs 18:21). There-

fore, many unscrupulous men develop skill with words. As Paul said about them, **“And by their smooth words and elegant speech they deceive the hearts of the naïve.”**

It is much more difficult to deceive those who have acquired knowledge and understanding. Therefore, like the predatory beasts of the earth, such men prey upon the weak and vulnerable. And naivety makes a man very vulnerable. That is true of both material things and spiritual things. For many men educated in worldly things are very naïve about spiritual things.

Consequently, the deceivers about Christ and his good news have used their smooth words and elegant speech to gain a large following. It is sad but true that most people who claim to believe in Christ have been deceived by such men. They are easily deceived because they do not take the time and effort to study the holy scriptures for themselves. They take the broad way that leads to destruction.

The same thing is true of those who do not believe. They too are deceived by the smooth words and elegant speech of men who deny God and scoff at the Holy Bible. Others are deceived by the skilled talkers who promote various false religions.

The world is filled with men who use smooth words and elegant speech to deceive the hearts of the naïve. Among criminals they are called confidence men. They are called that because they use their smooth words and elegant speech to gain enough confidence to prey upon the naïve, whether it be to cheat them of their possessions or to seduce them into doing something wrong.

Solomon also gave this warning about such men: **“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps”** (Proverbs 29:5).

Be wise in the good, pure in the evil

- **For your obedience reached to all men. Therefore I rejoice over you, but I want you to be indeed wise in the good and pure in the evil** (Romans 16:19).

Paul said the obedience to Christ of the disciples at Rome was known by all. Therefore, he rejoiced over them. What faithful Christian would not rejoice over them? I rejoice in my heart whenever I see faithful obedience to our Lord and Savior. And I grieve in my heart when I see disobedience.

However, obedience cannot be done without being wise in the good, and pure in the evil. Hence, Paul said that was what he wanted of them. And our wisdom in the good comes from the knowledge and understanding we acquire by studying the word of God, the Holy Bible. For as the Psalmist said, **“Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and light to my path”** (Psalm 119:105).

Being pure in the evil means keeping from sin and not being defiled by it. For sin defiles us and keeps us from being pure in the evil.

God will crush Satan under you

- **And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly** (Romans 16:20).

This is the second time Paul referred to our heavenly Father as the God of peace. Yet he was still going to crush Satan under their feet, which could not be done without conflict and the use of force. The just application of force always contributes to eventual peace. For unless sin is defeated, peace is impossible. And sin cannot be defeated without applying some force, because many refuse to repent.

Paul did not explain what he meant by God crushing Satan under their feet shortly. We cannot crush Satan because he is much too powerful; only God can crush him. The book of Revelation teaches that God is going to crush Satan at some time for a thousand years, and then later for all time, at the end of the world. In the sight of God those things occur shortly. For Peter said, **“But beloved, let not this one thing be ignored by you, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”** (Second Peter 3:8).

Paul also mentioned the relativity of time, when he referred to our lives of affliction as momentary: **“Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day. For our slight momentary affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory from extraordinariness to extraordinariness, while we look not at things seen, but at things not seen. For things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal”** (Second Corinthians 4:16-18). And James said, **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14).

Therefore, Paul’s meaning of the word shortly in that passage should not be understood as shortly or brief in our perspective. A lifetime is short in God’s sight. Indeed, a thousand years is short in his sight.

God will crush Satan under our feet because through our faith in Christ we will have victory over him. For the apostle John said, **“Because everything that has been begotten from God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith”** (First John 5:4). The world is part of Satan’s kingdom. We overcome the world with our faith, and God will crush Satan under our feet.

Part of the message Jesus sent from heaven to the congregation in Philadelphia was about that victory. He said to them, **“I know thy works. Behold, I have given before thee an opened door that none is able to shut it, because thou have little power, and thou keep my word, and did not deny my name. Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, those who say themselves to be Jews, and are not, but lie, behold, I will make them so that they will come and bow down before thy feet, and may know that I have loved thee”** (Revelation 3:8-9).

The grace of the Lord is with you

- **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you** (Romans 16:20).

That is the second time in this book that Paul spoke those words. Perhaps he spoke them for emphasis, assuring them that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was with them. And we too should be assured of that most wonderful grace for us, as long as we belong to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Being saluted

- **Timothy my co-workman, and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.**
- **I Tertius, the man who transcribed the letter, salute you in the Lord.**
- **Gaius my host, and of the whole congregation, salutes you.**
- **Erastus, the manager of the city, salutes you, and Quartus the brother**
(Romans 16:21-23).

Timothy is the most famous of all of those men. He is mentioned twenty-four times in the New Testament. And two of the books in the New Testament that Paul wrote were written to him. The Bible record tells more about who Timothy was when Paul first met him: **“And he [Paul] came to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain faithful Jewish woman, but of a Greek father, who was well reported of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go forth with him. And having taken him, he circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those regions, for they had all seen that his father was a Greek”** (Acts 16:1-3).

Paul developed a very close and lifelong relationship with Timothy. Indeed, he considered Timothy to be like a son to him. For Timothy served Paul faithfully in his work, often traveling with him. Paul could always count on Timothy.

Paul referred to Timothy as his co-workman. However, he only mentioned Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater as being his kinsmen. Nevertheless, they were all faithful Christians who were with him when he wrote this book. And the record in the book of Acts tells a little more about both Lucius and Jason.

The Bible record says that Lucius had been with Paul in the congregation in Antioch of Syria, which, remember, had served as Paul’s home congregation. The passage that mentions him says, **“Now there were some men from the congregation that was in Antioch, prophets and teachers, including Barnabas, and Simeon called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen reared with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul”** (Acts 13:1).

Lucius was called a Cyrenian. Cyrene was a Greek city on the north coast of Africa west of Egypt and due south of Greece. It was located in what is now called Libya. The man who was ordered to carry the cross of Jesus was also a Cyrenian (see Luke 23:26). There is no other reference to Lucius besides this one in Romans.

The only other reference we have to Jason is one in Acts about what happened when Paul was in Thessalonica: **“But the disobedient Jews having taken along certain evil men of the marketplaces, and having gathered a mob, were rioting the city. And having stood by the house of Jason, they sought to bring them out to the populace.**

“And not having found them, they dragged Jason and some brothers to the city rulers, shouting, The men who have agitated the world, these are present here also, whom Jason has received. And all these men are acting against the decrees of Caesar, asserting another man to be king, Jesus. And they disturbed the multitude and the

city rulers when they heard these things. And after taking bond from Jason and the other men, they released them" (Acts 17:5-9).

Nothing more is said in the New Testament about Sosipater and Tertius.

Regarding Tertius' transcription of the letter, there is considerable evidence that Paul had poor vision. And the fact that Tertius transcribed this letter is some evidence of it. Other evidence is what he said in his book to the Galatians: **"But ye know that through a weakness of the flesh I preached the good news to you the first time. And ye did not disdain, nor did ye reject my trial in my flesh, but ye received me as an agent of God, as Christ Jesus. Where then is your satisfaction? For I testify to you, that if possible, having plucked your eyes out, ye would have given them to me"** (Galatians 4:14-15), and, **"See in how large letters I wrote to you with my hand"** (Galatians 6:11).

Concerning Gaius, Paul was apparently residing with a man named Gaius when he wrote this book. Remember, Jesus disapproved of evangelists going from house to house, because he said to his apostles when he sent them out, **"And into whatever house ye enter, first say, Peace to this house. And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him, and if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house eating and drinking from their things, for the workman is worthy of his wage. Do not depart from house to house"** (Luke 10:5-7).

Also the congregation where Paul was staying apparently assembled in Gaius' house. For Paul not only said that Gaius was his host, but also **"of the whole congregation."** And that congregation saluted the one at Rome.

There are four other passages in the New Testament that mention the name Gaius. One is about what happened when a silversmith at Ephesus provoked a riot against Paul: **"And the whole city was filled with the confusion. And they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, traveling companions of Paul"** (Acts 19:29). That passage says Gaius was a Macedonian.

Another passage in the book of Acts lists several men, including a Gaius, as having traveled with Paul: **"And there accompanied him as far as Asia, Sopater a Berean, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius a Derbean, and Timothy, and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus"** (Acts 20:4). However, that Gaius was said to be a Derbean. Derbe was a city in the province of Lycaonia.

Paul also mentioned having personally immersed a man of Corinth named Gaius, when he was rebuking the Corinthians for having divisions. He said, **"Now I say this. That each of you actually say, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye immersed in the name of Paul? I thank God that I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest some man should say that I immersed in my name"** (First Corinthians 1:12-15).

The apostle John wrote his third letter to a man named Gaius, whom he called beloved, saying, **"The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth"** (Third John 1:1). Whether that was one of the men that had been with Paul, or was another men entirely is not know. Hence, there were at least three early Christians named Gaius, and perhaps four.

Regarding Erastus, Paul said he was the manager of "the city." However, Paul does not identify that city. It was not common for the early church to have many men that were

prominent in the world. For Paul said to the Corinthians, **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent”** (First Corinthians 1:26).

There are two other passages that mention Erastus: **“And having sent into Macedonia two of those who help him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while”** (Acts 19:22), and, **“Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left being sick at Miletus”** (Second Timothy 4:20). Perhaps Erastus was replaced by some other man as manager so that he could work more closely with Paul.

Nothing more is said in the New Testament about Quartus the brother. All of those men that Paul mentioned saluted the congregation at Rome. It is doubtful they were the only men in the congregation there with Paul. They were probably the more prominent and active ones, and wanted to send their personal greeting to the disciples in Rome.

The grace of the Lord is with you

- **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with all of you. Truly** (Romans 16:24).

That is the third time in the book that Paul said those words. We should always remember, when we belong to the Lord his grace is with us. And nothing can even approach the blessings of his grace. Therefore, **“Rejoice always”** (First Thessalonians 5:16).

Glory to God

- **Now to him who is able to establish you according to my good news, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to a revelation of the mystery that has been kept secret for eternal times, but that was now revealed, and by prophetic scriptures, according to a commandment of the eternal God that was made known to all the nations for obedience of faith, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages. Truly** (Romans 16:25-27).

God is able to establish us, meaning to make us solid and well grounded in his truth and righteousness. That promise is part of Paul’s good news, which means it is part of the good news of Christ which Paul taught. And that, together with the preaching of Jesus himself, and the good news of Christ taught by the other apostles, comprises the full and complete good news of Christ. For the preaching of Jesus while he was on the earth was only part of his doctrine of the good news. He commissioned his apostles to complete that doctrine when he departed back to heaven.

That doctrine was **“according to a revelation of the mystery that has been kept secret for eternal times.”** The good news of our salvation was a mystery both to men and to the agents of heaven because it had been kept secret throughout all times until it was revealed. God kept it secret (except from his Son Jesus Christ) even from before time began. It was part of his master plan to defeat his enemies, of which Satan is the most powerful.

That mystery was revealed with the teachings and the doctrine of the good news that Christ brought into the world. For by the sinless life of the Son of God, Satan was con-

demned and cast out of heaven. The sinless life of Jesus also qualified him to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. It made possible the salvation of every soul on the earth who repents and becomes a disciple of Christ.

The good news of Christ fulfilled the prophetic scriptures about him and his salvation. And that good news of Christ was **“according to a commandment of the eternal God.”** For God commanded his Son to come into this world, endure its trials and temptations, proclaim the good news of our salvation, and live a sinless life. And that good news **“was made known to all the nations for obedience of faith.”** It was not only taught to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. And that good news of our salvation requires obedience of faith. We must believe and obey.

Our obedience of faith is to the only wise God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, to him is the glory into the ages. Truly. Those who are closest to God in heaven continually give him the glory. For when John was describing the throne of God in his great vision of heaven, he said, **“And straightaway I became in spirit. And behold, a throne was set in heaven, and him sitting upon the throne similar in appearance to a jasper and a sardius stone. And a rainbow was around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.**

“And around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders clothed in white garments, and golden crowns upon their heads. And out of the throne proceeds lightnings and voices and thunders. And seven lamps of fire burned before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

“And before the throne was like a glassy sea similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne, were four living creatures containing eyes in front and back. ... And the four living creatures, one by one, each having six wings, are full of eyes around and inside. And they have no cessation day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord, the Almighty God, he was, and who is, and who is coming.

“And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, he who lives into the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders would fall down before him who sits on the throne, and would worship him who lives into the ages of the ages, and would cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, our Lord and God, the Holy, to take the glory and the honor and the power, because thou created all things, and because by thy will they are, and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Truly God is worthy of the glory into the ages. And even though those who hate him refuse to give him glory, they will all eventually be forced to confess him and submit to him. For Paul said, **“For it is written, I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God”** (Romans 14:2-11).

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